



S E R M O N S ,

ETC.,

BY THE REV. ISAAC KEELING.









*Yours most sincerely,*  
*Isaac Keeline*

# SERMONS

BY THE

REV. ISAAC KEELING

With Memorials

OF HIS

LIFE, CHARACTER, AND CORRESPONDENCE.

EDITED BY THE

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LONDON :

HAMILTON, ADAMS, & Co.; SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & Co. ;

SOLD ALSO AT 66, PATERNOSTER ROW.

LEEDS : H. W. WALKER, BRIGGATE.

1871.



# CONTENTS.

	PAGE
MEMORIAL SKETCH . . . . .	1
LETTERS . . . . .	32
SERMONS—	
I. THE WORTH OF THE SOUL . . . . .	57
II. LOT . . . . .	76
III. JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN . . . . .	87
IV. GIDEON . . . . .	102
V. RUTH . . . . .	109
VI. SAUL'S DISTRESS . . . . .	121
VII. RIZPAH; OR GOD'S REMEMBRANCE OF OPPRESSED BONDSMEN.	129
VIII. DAVID'S LAMENTATION FOR ABSALOM . . . . .	138
IX. JEHOSEPHAT REPROVED; OR THE POSSIBLE MISCHIEF OF GOOD MEN'S INCONSISTENCIES . . . . .	167
X. JEHOIADA . . . . .	178
XI. BARUCH: AMBITION FORBIDDEN TO GODLY MEN . . . . .	192
XII. BELSHAZZAR . . . . .	200
XIII. SCRIPTURAL VIEWS OF HUMAN LIFE: A SERMON ON OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF THE REV. ROBERT NEWTON, D.D. . . . .	212
XIV. THE DAY OF MY DEATH . . . . .	233
XV. DIVINE PROTECTION . . . . .	240
XVI. THE PRAYER OF GOD'S PEOPLE . . . . .	251
XVII. MEN OF THE WORLD . . . . .	261
XVIII. THE WILL OF GOD DONE IN EARTH AS IN HEAVEN . . . . .	268
XIX. THE THREE CROSSES . . . . .	276
XX. ON CONSCIENCE, VIEWED IN CONNEXION WITH PRACTICAL JUDGMENT . . . . .	291
XXI. THINGS WHICH MAKE FOR PEACE . . . . .	306
XXII. FOLLOWERS OF GOD . . . . .	312
XXIII. DOING ALL IN THE NAME OF JESUS . . . . .	322
XXIV. THE CONTRAST . . . . .	330
XXV. THE FINAL JUDGMENT . . . . .	338
XXVI. ON PERFORMING DUTIES WITH OUR MIGHT . . . . .	345
XXVII. ON PERFORMING DUTIES WITH OUR MIGHT ( <i>Continued</i> ) . . . . .	364



## P R E F A C E .

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It was for years the cherished purpose of Mr. KEELING to prepare a volume of Sermons for publication.

Manifold ministerial duties long prevented the carrying out of his purpose.

When rest and leisure came to him through the advance of age and physical infirmities, he addressed himself, with the full strength of his mind, cheerfully to his literary work.

Some of the Sermons have received his last finish, and all of them have been repeatedly revised and improved. They will be found to exhibit what he firmly maintained as essential elements in public discourses—clearness, vigour, naturalness, point and suggestiveness.

They are published just as he left them by his own hand.

May He who hath spoken to us by His Son, and in whom we have redemption according to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence, give His Holy Spirit to render this volume the means of conviction, of reproof, and of instruction in righteousness.

W W.



MEMORIAL SKETCH  
OF THE  
REV. ISAAC KEELING

BY HIS DAUGHTER MRS. SMALLPAGE, AND HIS  
SON-IN-LAW REV. G. R. OSBORN.

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THE late Rev. ISAAC KEELING was born at Newcastle-under-Lyne, February 12th, 1789. He is described as a remarkably intelligent child, giving, at a very tender age, indications of those powers of mind which distinguished him in after life. He sometimes remarked, that though he could distinctly remember having the small-pox severely when between three and four years old, he could not recall the time when he was unable to read; and that Mr. Rodda, one of the early Methodist preachers, gave him the first sixpence he ever had, for reading the title-page of a book at the age of three. He could write before most children of his years could read; and the delight with which he practised writing, with bits of chalk, on wood or stone, at every opportunity, before he knew the luxury of a pen, he has often described as a passion; as also his love of drawing, in which he made voluntary attempts at a very early period. An original design of his, in pen and ink, executed before he possessed such treasures as lead pencil and india-rubber, representing Autumn and Winter, is still in preservation, and is wonderful as the production of a child of six years and a half.

His parents were godly and devout, and their home was a centre of religious and intellectual influence to their



children. His father was a local preacher and class-leader, a man of poetic fervour and lively imagination, and a great reader, often rising at three or four in the morning to enjoy a favourite author, before commencing his daily toil at six. He died, "rejoicing in hope," in his seventy-eighth year. His mother survived her husband eleven years. Of her sterling good sense and many excellences he often spoke with great filial tenderness and respect; and during her long widowhood he proved by more than words how deeply he loved and honoured her. Her "adorning" was eminently that "of a meek and quiet spirit," and her children rose up "and called her blessed."

From about 1797 to 1803, he went to the best school in the neighbourhood, that of the late Mr. Thomas Kenip; but being of an excessively shy and retiring disposition, and during the first year of his attendance at the school, very much out of health, and consequently not able to be punctually in his place in the morning, his master treated him as a sluggard. By degrees his force of character manifested itself; he proved to be an apt and diligent scholar; and his master henceforth watched his progress with pride and interest. His thirst for knowledge and choice of books were remarkable. Before he was ten years old, he had three times read Blair's Lectures through; and he eagerly perused the "Spectator," Langhorne's translations of Plutarch's Lives, a "History of Modern Europe," and similar works. The early reading of these, and the standard works in his father's well-selected library, exerted a plastic and permanent influence upon his tastes and habits, which, in after life, he regarded, and frequently referred to, as part of a providential training. Nor was his Bible neglected. Like Timothy of old, he "knew the Scriptures from a child." He has often spoken to his children of the intense pleasure and interest with which he studied Old Testament history, which he mastered so

thoroughly, that he felt as if he had lived in their times, and shared in their trials, conflicts, and triumphs. The Word of God was hid in his heart, and became, in very deed, through life "a light unto" his "feet, and a lamp unto" his "path." "In age and feebleness extreme," when too weak to lift the Book, his delight was to have it so placed that he might turn over its familiar pages, and still search out its treasures of wisdom and consolation. His surviving brother, Mr. Enoch Keeling, of Etruria, thus sums up his recollections of him in regard to his love of books:—"As to his reading propensity, I have sometimes brought a book home in the evening from a library in Burslem, and as I was going down in the morning, he would be coming up, having read the book through during the night." At school he delighted and excelled in arithmetic and composition. He frequently wrote themes and essays for his elder fellow pupils before he was set to write them on his own account. When thirteen years old, after a close competition, in which the late Josiah Conder was a rival, he carried off a silver medal for an essay, "Showing, by argument and example, the inefficacy of human laws to repress crimes and immorality."

He wrote verses too, in his school days, with considerable facility, some of which were so good that he had difficulty in maintaining his own authorship. In one instance he lost the first prize in a competition, because of his inability to convince the judges that the merit of the following four lines in particular was his own.

"In drunkenness he drowns the human shape,  
Degrades his reason and becomes an ape;  
His figure's but the mimic of a man,  
The rest declares him of the bestial clan."

"The Inquiry after Happiness," a poem written at fifteen years of age, was published in the "Wesleyan-Methodist

Magazine" for 1809. It contains the Inquiry, the Answer, and the Resolve. We give the Resolve as a specimen.

Thanks to the friendly power, that deigns  
My devious steps to guide,  
From error's fascinating scenes,  
Where death and hell reside.

Henceforth religion's call I'll hear,  
Her heavenly voice obey :  
May she my pensive moments cheer,  
My rebel passions sway !

May she her balm divine impart,  
And heal the wounds of sin ;  
Stamp Jesu's image on my heart,  
And plant His peace within !

May she my fallen powers restore,  
My soul for heaven prepare ;  
And when I here exist no more,  
Let me enjoy thee there !

Shortly after leaving school, he became the master of a large day-school, which he conducted in a public room offered him for the purpose ; and among his pupils were many of his former schoolfellows, some of them older than himself. As a teacher, he had good success, having great aptitude and pleasure in imparting instruction, but the business details of the profession became thoroughly distasteful to him ; and at length he turned his attention to engraving, in which his artistic power and skill opened fair, and even alluring, prospects before him. One of his designs, drawn while he was employed as an engraver, is still preserved, and possesses considerable merit ; it is also executed with great skill.

From childhood he had been strictly conscientious and truthful ; uniformly obedient to his parents ; and, in addition to the hallowed influences of a religious home-training, he was no stranger to those special drawings from on high which are so constantly vouchsafed to the children of the upright. Thus he had been preserved from

outward sin of every kind ; but his sixteenth birthday, in February, 1805, found him unrenewed in heart, and condemning himself as “vain, ambitious, and worldly.” In September of the same year, his first Ticket as a member of Society is dated, and in the intervening months that mighty inward change had been effected which altered the whole course of his life ; and he set a seal to his profession, which, by the grace of God, he was enabled to adorn for sixty-four years.

The account of his conversion, written to a friend, in 1806, by his own hand, has happily been preserved, and is as follows :—

“DEAR FRIEND,

“I intended writing to you soon after your departure, but have put it off from time to time ; however, I embrace this opportunity of opening my mind to you, and communicating what I had neither courage nor time to tell you before you left us. You may remember my telling you that early last spring I read the ‘Age of Reason.’ When I met with it, I was very ill prepared for such an attack. I was full of vanity and self-confidence, and habitually indulged ambitious views and vain imaginations ; yet I had a tender conscience. I often felt condemnation, and I dared not sin with the multitude. When I first began to read Paine, I was shocked at the impious rashness of some of his assertions, and read with indignation ; but my insatiable curiosity impelled me to proceed, and I read on till I believed as little of Revelation as Paine himself. (Here I may observe, this was probably permitted as a punishment for my immoderate indulgence in reading : many fall from grace by using lawful things unlawfully.) I continued in this infidel state some time ; at the desire of my father and mother, I read ‘Bishop Watson’s Apology ;’ but this alone was not sufficient to satisfy all my doubts. However, what reading could not do, experience did ; I

became weary of the world and all its enjoyments ; I sank into a hopeless, melancholy, slothful state of mind ; I would have been glad to have returned to my original nothingness, and longed for death both of body and soul.

“But before this time I had begun to read and admire the ‘Economy of Human Life,’ and became so fond of it, that I carried it in my pocket, and perused it at every opportunity. I was exceedingly pleased with the exalted views and descriptions it gave of various virtues, and I flattered myself I had found a good substitute for the Bible : but when I vainly endeavoured to verify these exalted and sublime ideas in my own actions and deportment, I was sadly disappointed. I discovered that the descriptions of the vanity, weakness, and dependent state of human nature, given in the Word of God, agreed much better with my own experience. I found that I was a weak, short-sighted mortal. I looked back on my past life, and saw myself changeable as the wind, and uncertain as the ocean : I saw that it was vain and fruitless to make resolutions, and to swim against the stream of my corrupt nature in my own strength. I saw that in the things of time and sense, there was nothing solid ; nothing capable of affording lasting pleasure ; nothing worth living for. I was humbled under a sense of my own weakness. I felt the fallibility of human reason, and the insufficiency of it as a rule of life ; and in some measure saw the necessity of a revelation to guide our opinions and to direct our practice.

“When I was thus weary of worldly pursuits, and humbled under a sense of my weakness, ignorance, and instability, God breathed into my soul a desire for the enjoyments of religion ; I was led to examine my state, I began to relish godly books, and to break off my sins. In this state I went to the Methodist chapel ; and a sermon of the Rev. Edward Jackson’s, on ‘God be merciful to me,

heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee,' was made a means of deepening my convictions. In the progress of the sermon I was enabled to see the deformity and sinfulness of sin in a manner I never experienced before; after the sermon he gave out the hymn which begins with

'Arise, my soul, arise,  
Shake off thy guilty fears, &c.

"and when he came to the last verse,

'My God is reconciled,  
His pardoning voice I hear,  
He owns me for His child,  
I can no longer fear;  
With confidence I now draw nigh,  
And, Father, Abba, Father, cry!'

"These words affected me in a manner quite new to me, I found power to believe in Christ, and to come to Him for help and salvation. As I was going out of the chapel I felt a sweet calm and a solemn peace, and a measure of love to God and joy in the Holy Ghost; and on my way home, the last verse of the hymn before mentioned came to my mind with more sweetness than before, and I believe I then felt the witness of the Spirit that I was a child of God. But I do not think I received so much grace at once as some of the children of God do; for it pleased Him to let me be tried with doubts, fears, and scruples a quarter of a year; and I gradually grew up in faith and love from Midsummer till Michaelmas. On Michaelmas Day, in the afternoon, I was reading that part of 'Pilgrim's Progress' where Ignorance is introduced; I compared my faith with his, and could not but see there was some difference; but I felt a fear lest I had been walking in the light of sparks of my own kindling; while I was thus reasoning and halting between faith and unbelief, the Lord raised me up with,

'How vast the love that Him inclined  
To bleed and die for thee!'

and enabled me to go on my way rejoicing with 'joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

"I have met in Cobridge class ever since Mr. Jabez Bunting was over, and have received two Tickets. I am glad to inform you there have been six members added since Midsummer, and we have good ground to expect further increase. At present I go on comfortably; my trials are outbalanced by my enjoyments; I feel my own weakness more than ever, but I feel also that my God holds me by the hand; that when I wade through temptation He keeps my head above water, He saves 'mine eyes from tears' and my feet 'from falling.'"\*

From the time of his conversion, notwithstanding the barrier presented by his almost insurmountable shyness, and though some, unwisely, would have had him confine himself to the sphere of a local preacher and thus avoid the sacrifice of secular advantages within his reach, he felt the inward call of God to preach His Gospel; and he deliberately chose the toils and hardships of the Methodist itinerancy.

At this period Methodism was vigorously aggressive; every recruit was promptly sent into the ranks, and made acquainted with active service. Gifts such as Mr. Keeling's were not likely to be overlooked, and at the Conference of 1811 he was received on trial, and sent to

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\* We cannot forbear calling the attention of our readers to one important sentence of the above letter: "When I first begun to read Paine," &c. It is sadly possible that many similar confessions ought to be made by the readers of modern sceptical literature. There are books now in circulation which carefully avoid the coarse irreverence of Paine and his school, but which are not less hostile to the *spirit* of Christian faith, and to the essential doctrines of Christianity. Young readers should beware. They are not called to read anti-Christian books, however clear or popular these may be; they are not in the path of duty, nor in the way of safety, while so doing; and they are not at all fully awake to the danger they thus incur. It is not well to travel even a short distance in company with the great adversary, lest he compel us to go much further than we ever contemplated.

the Belper Circuit. Here, and in some subsequent appointments, he had a good share of the long journeys, humble fare, and "labours more abundant" which fell to the lot of a Methodist preacher in those days. In a letter written about this time he mentions, by way of excuse for not having written sooner, that he had "made nine sermons and walked forty-five miles between Sunday and Thursday." But he gave it as his deliberate opinion in later years that there was *then* more time for thought and study than at present. He would say, "We used to preach more sermons, and to meet more classes; but we were not loaded with harassing and incessant business details." As a young man, his delivery was so rapid, that he was often told he gave as much material in the time allotted for one sermon as would serve for two or three; and the late Rev. Jonathan Edmondson, whose friendship and esteem he possessed, and whose advice and counsel he greatly valued, frequently warned him against injuring himself by undue effort. The calm tones and deliberate utterance of his mature years were the result of resolute self-discipline. Mr. Keeling was not in the habit of talking or writing much of himself; but there are touching records, in a few letters to an intimate friend, which reveal some of the innermost springs of his sensitive nature, and the trials peculiar to it; his earnest yearnings and diligent strivings after his own exalted standard of all that a Christian and a minister of the New Testament should be; and his humble and devout thankfulness to God, to whom he rendered all the praise, for the fruits of his ministry.

The first four years of his labours as a travelling preacher were spent in four successive Circuits. In each at first he felt the loneliness of a stranger's heart to a distressing degree; the more so from the shyness before alluded to, which concealed from a casual observer or ordinary acquaintance the depths of a truly warm, generous, and



confiding nature: and he was at first painfully conscious of being more wondered at than appreciated, in his pulpit efforts, in each fresh sphere. But the blameless consistency of his walk among them, and his masterly expositions of Divine truth, invariably endeared him to his flock, brought seals to his ministry, and secured him a hearty and unanimous invitation to remain another year. On quitting Belper, his first Circuit, he writes to the forenamed friend, "I preached my farewell sermon in Cromford chapel on Thursday evening, from, 'Brethren, pray for us.' My congregation were nearly all in tears, and I among the rest: Mrs. S—— said she was afraid of being forced to weep aloud;—I was for my own part very happy: my mind was dissolved in religious tenderness. I am still cheerful and contented, resigned to the will of God, and resolved to live to His glory. I could not say so much of myself if I did not know that it would be interesting to you." In writing from his fourth Circuit to another friend, after expressing disparaging views of himself, he adds, "But here I perhaps ought to acknowledge that, both at Gainsborough and Burnley, several ascribe their conversion to my ministry."

During his fifty-two years of service as a Wesleyan-Methodist preacher, his labours were greatly blessed of God, both in building up believers, and in awakening the unconcerned. His sermons have sometimes been rather unfairly described as "treats to the intellectual few." While his preaching certainly required attention, and well repaid that of the most cultivated, he conscientiously aimed to present his thoughts in language that the "way-farer" need not misunderstand, and uniformly avoided using *uncommon* words, if any more simple, or in more general use, would express the same meaning; and he was glad to know that by many of the godly poor his preaching

was highly prized. Calm, impressive, and reverent in manner, solid in thought, clear, finished, and forcible in style, his discourses told powerfully upon the consciences of men, and commended themselves to reflective minds of all classes as the manifestation of Divine truth. One pleasing instance of the success of his labours may be recorded here. A cabman in London, after taking Mr. Keeling some distance, declined to accept his fare; and in explanation, asked his astonished passenger if he remembered preaching on a particular occasion from a certain text; and added, that under the sermon his soul had been set at liberty.

Many of Mr. Keeling's sermons, especially those on Scripture characters, will be long and well remembered. They were marked by delineations so singularly keen, and searchings of heart so close, that none who heard could fail to appreciate them and profit by them. He was able also as a son of consolation, ministering succour to the tempted, comfort to the afflicted, and encouragement to the fearful in heart. In doctrine he showed uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that could not be condemned, and "he that was of the contrary part" often "had reason to be ashamed."

Mr. Keeling often exercised his poetic powers, and, by request, wrote many hymns for Sunday-school occasions, and several for the opening of chapels. The following was composed for the opening of Brunswick Chapel, Macclesfield, in 1824, and published at the request of the late Dr Bunting in the Magazine for that year.

"Will God indeed to earth descend,  
In temples made with hands to dwell?  
Lo! round, above, the heavens extend,  
Can science their dimensions tell?  
Their viewless bounds we seek in vain;  
Yet, can the heavens our God contain?"

No ! the vast firmament, with all  
 Its wandering stars, and seas of light,  
 The deeps which echo the sad call  
 Of spirits lost in endless night,  
 Heaven, hell, and all their bounds include,  
 Are points in His infinitude.

Yet, through His co-eternal Son,  
 Who wields all power on earth, on high,  
 By fervent prayer His grace is won ;  
 He hears the penitential sigh ;  
 And saints assembling in His name,  
 His presence in their midst may claim.

Thus saith the great and lofty One,  
 Who liveth in eternity,  
 On high, apart, I set my throne ;  
 Yet with the souls who turn to Me,  
 The contrite, who themselves abase,  
 I have a chosen dwelling-place."

We add a few other specimens.

#### ON THE SUDDEN DEATH OF THE REV. THOMAS STANLEY.

1832.

Haply perceived, in his extremity,—  
 Faint, lone, and speechless, sinking in the street—  
 Then—unknown faces looking pity on him—  
 Strange voices questioning and counselling,  
 Strange hands upholding his collapsing frame,  
 Laving his brow, with kind solicitude,  
 And raising cordials to his lips in vain,  
 Mild, upright Stanley raised his dying eyes,  
 Looking devotionally up to heaven,  
 As turning to a known, all-powerful friend,  
 From those unknown, who pitying, wanted power !  
 Then smiling placidly, on her whose aid, had thus the thanks of a departing  
     soul,  
 With saintly sweetness, tranquilly expired.  
 Death beautifully solemn ! absent all  
 Whom sinking nature loves to see around ;  
 Those best beloved, whose sadly kind last looks  
 Had soothed him, though he could not speak to them ;  
 And those the brethren of his soul, whose voice,  
 In supplication raised availeth much.  
 Painful their absence in his mute distress ;  
 Sudden the alarming summons : but the bright

Light of his countenance was God, his help ;  
 The pavement under him, like Jacob's pillow,  
 The Bethel stone, was awful with God's presence ;  
 The beauty of holiness, in death immortal,  
 Was seen by strangers in his quiet smile,  
 As the vast, silent firmament resounds,  
 In reason's ear, its origin divine ;  
 So, without voice, this holy pilgrim's end  
 Proclaimed the all-conquering power of godliness,  
 Goodness with majesty of heavenly calmness crowned.

TO A GOOD WIFE. (MRS. KEELING.)

Companion of my calmest, happiest hours,  
 Dear partner of my homefelt joys and cares,  
 For thee, in silent thought, my spirit pours  
 Its glad thanksgivings and incessant prayers.  
*Thou* art my world. What once to me were snares,—  
 Wealth, emulation, fame,—are now disarm'd ;  
 But Love's light yoke my heart contented bears ;  
 By pleasing conjugal enchantment charm'd ;  
 And only by the fear of future loss alarm'd.

When travelling far, in sickness or in grief,  
 Of strangers weary, lonely, and depress'd,  
 The thought of thee administers relief,  
 The progress homeward soothes my heart to rest ;  
 Arriving, I'm unutterably bless'd ;  
 Thy tender welcome banishes all care ;  
 Pain, sickness, sorrow, leave my lighten'd breast ;  
 Peace, confidence, and joy re-enter there ;  
 All things appear transform'd, all good, serene and fair.

While conquerors climb the summits of renown,  
 O'er mounds of dead, through slaughter, flood and flame,  
 And, from their strong eminences, frown  
 On half the wasted world ; while others aim  
 At wealth, or office, or a titled name ;  
*Our* choice be love, and meek, domestic peace,  
 Obedient faith, and conscience void of blame ;  
 Joys that may grow as health and strength decrease,  
 And in full vigour last when selfish pleasures cease.

Oft bows my soul before the Saviour's throne ;  
 Its prayer—Me from idolatry defend,  
 And keep, O jealous God, my heart thy own ;  
 Yet still thy dearest, dangerous boon, O lend ;  
 Spare her thou gav'st me till my sojourn end ;

Instruct our babe *thy* saving truth to know ;  
 Let *thy* pure influence on our hearts descend ;  
 Our spirits purge from love of things below ;  
 Our strength in weakness be, our bliss in worldly woe.

While God upholds us in this dying world,  
 The cares of love be still our sweet employ ;  
 When Death's approach, with shadowing wing unfurl'd,  
 Shall warn us to resign terrestrial joy,  
 Despair shall not our parting hour anny ;  
 Hope, strong, exultant, shall the mourner cheer,  
 Through HIM who died that He might death destroy ;  
 Our mingled dust th' archangel's call shall hear,  
 And live, in love and joy, through heaven's eternal year.

BRADWELL, *May 26th*, 1817.

I. K.

### THE SEQUEL.\*

Full twenty years ago, that strain I sung,  
 In Derbyshire's sweet vales, below Mam-Tor,  
 And oft elsewhere : but, yesterday, I hung  
 Over her grave, beside the shelving shore,  
 While ancient ocean's everlasting roar  
 Mix'd with the priests' soft voice. The solemn sound  
 Of many waters,—the dread words of power  
 Which bless the dead in Christ,—the tombs around,—  
 Rapt me to those abodes where bliss my love had found.

### \* OBITUARY NOTICE OF HIS WIFE.

November 15th, 1838, at Sunderland, Esther, the beloved wife of the Rev. Isaac Keeling, Wesleyan minister, died, to whom, for twenty-three years, she had been united in the Lord. She was truly a disciple of the Lord Jesus ; and, in a somewhat lingering disorder, experienced the full power of His grace to sustain and comfort. Her mind sometimes wandered ; but when free from delirium, she retained much self-possession, and soundness of judgment. From all doubt and distrust, she was mercifully preserved, and enabled, with unhesitating faith, to apply to herself the various assurances of the goodness and faithfulness of God which were repeated to her. In this truly sanctified affliction, she experienced no love of life, no fear of death, nor any distracting solitudes for her eleven children. Her last hours were spent in patient hope, waiting for the coming of her Lord.

I. K.

### OBITUARY NOTICE OF HIS ELDEST SON.

April 25th, 1839, at the King's Arms Inn, Glasgow, in the twenty-third year of his age, William Brown Keeling, M.D., eldest son of the Rev. Isaac Keeling. His sudden removal is an impressive instance of the nothingness of temporal hopes and successes. On the 24th he was recognised in the

Despair did not our parting hour annoy ;  
 Nor fail'd in pitying help and gracious cheer  
 From Him who died that He might death destroy  
 Mingled or not, our dust His voice shall bear ;  
 Yea, sooner, shall our meeting souls appear  
 Together at His feet. His spirit shall turn  
 Our children's hearts : with lowly, loving fear.  
 I and my house will serve Him while we mourn,  
 Till all with her shall rest, with her to God return.

Still, in sad dreams, I watch beside her bed,  
 Or cross, with stealthy step, her darken'd room,  
 Or deem she feebly calls on me for aid,  
 Or seek new remedies ; in 'wilderer gloom,  
 Half-recollect the death-scene and the tomb  
 And wake to consciousness of mateless woe,—  
 She calls, alas ! no more. Roused I resume  
 The better thoughts that leave the flesh below,  
 And join her spirit on high, where saints with seraphs glow.

Shores of eternity, near which I wait,  
 Whence she hath voyaged to return no more,—  
 Depths of eternity, stupendous height  
 Length, breadth, which disencumber'd spirits explore,—  
 Joys of eternity,—friends gone before,—  
 I soon shall hail you. While my Esther died,  
 I saw, by faith above the starry floor  
 The King of saints ; and, ere I left her side  
 Shared balmy bliss with her, my love beatified.

SUNDERLAND, *Nov. 20th*, 1838.

I. K.

University of Glasgow as Doctor of Medicine ; and, the same evening, urgent symptoms of disease induced him to send for medical aid. In the afternoon of the 25th, he reluctantly consented that his father, who was then expecting to hear of his return to Gateshead, should be informed of his illness ; and, about two hours afterwards, expired. His sorrowing relations are driven for consolation to the past. They have reason to believe that he was converted to God at Woodhouse Grove School, about nine years ago. He has since been a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Societies at Louth, Glasgow, and Gateshead. During his ardent pursuits of scientific attainments, there were seasons of obvious spiritual lukewarmness ; but soon after he had begun to practise in Gateshead, he stated to his father that he was already a member of a class, which he had selected after brief residence ; and that it was his settled purpose to live and die a consistent Wesleyan Methodist. To those who knew him, it is unnecessary to say anything of his intelligence and amiableness. To all who read this notice of his early removal, the reflection must surely be obvious, that the most important of all attainments, in any age or condition, is that habitual preparation for death, which it is equally our duty and privilege to possess.

I. K.

## ERRATUM

In the last stanza but one of the foregoing poem in the February number of the *Methodist Magazine*, 1839.

Far be from me the fault, to have complained  
Of *matchless* woe. Poetic license might  
Exaggerate thus ; or passion, unrestrained  
By Jesu's gentleness ; but 'tis not right  
For one who feels the soft, sustaining might  
Of kindness, human and divine, to call  
*His sorrows matchless : mateless* did I write.  
Let Zion, as fierce Babylon's weeping thrall,  
Demand, " What grief like mine ! " with Him who grieved for all.

SUNDERLAND, *February 7th*, 1839.

I. K.

## ON BEING REQUESTED TO WRITE SOMETHING NEW.

(The last lines Mr. Keeling wrote.)

" The thing which hath been, is that which shall be. . . Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new ? It hath been already of old time, which was before us. "—ECCLES. i. 9, 10.

When first the pair in Paradise, reclined  
At eve, survey'd the kindling firmament,  
'Twas *new* ;—but, as the constellations shined  
On them, so still those countless eyes are bent  
On us, with awful gaze, and beams unspent.  
Those watchers witness'd when, across the plain,  
Lot and his family from Sodom went,—  
They saw the Red Sea parted, and the slain,  
When God let loose the waves on Pharaoh and his train.

The spirit of pilgrimage, in lands remote,  
Joys in believing it some trace hath found  
Of worthies old. The rock that Moses smote,  
The well of Bethlehem, or the sacred ground  
Of Olivet,—what visioned forms surround  
Of might and majesty ! Such scenes have ties  
That link with th' ancient past thoughts onward bound,  
Primeval splendours still, in evening skies,  
We share with Eden's pair, and see the same moon rise.

On earth, sin, shame, wrath, sorrow, toil, and death,  
When man rebell'd, were *new* ; and *new* the grace  
Promised, unsought, before the flaming breath  
Of cherubim had driven him from the place  
His guilt defiled. Throughout all time his race  
Inherit sin and death, with grace Divine,  
So free, *who will* the mercy may embrace.  
Thus that which " hath been " " shall be," line on line,  
Till Paradise, renew'd, with Jesu's glories shine.

SOUTHPORT, *Dec.*, 1863.

Mr. Keeling's habit of diligent and discriminating reading became a second nature, so that at seventy years of age and upwards an interesting book has been known to keep him lost in enjoyment till long past midnight: he thus accumulated great and varied stores of information, which were rendered constantly available by a vigorous memory and a sound judgment. Had his education been classical, he would probably have attained to eminent scholarship; he had a thorough acquaintance with the great masters of English literature, and found it possible to form a pure style and to cultivate a severe taste, principally by their aid. His was a singular instance of classical taste, apart from classical learning. Mr. Keeling's mind was analytical; he delighted to investigate, but above all to distinguish and discriminate, and he did so with rare skill. His keen perception enabled him to penetrate a subject quickly, but his quick penetration and sagacious insight were not allowed to supply the place of mature consideration. His genuine courtesy, which was especially apparent in conversation, placed his mature wisdom and extensive knowledge freely at the disposal of others; and he seldom declined to impart what it was often a rich treat to receive. His humility, added to his courtesy, rendered him also a patient listener, though few to whom he listened were his equals. With one conversational vice, however, he had no patience; he could not endure to hear men state and defend opinions which they did not really hold; he said it was unprincipled, and demoralizing, and never failed to protest against it; even the plea of being in jest would not satisfy him. Truth must not be trifled with in his presence, however slightly. He believed that he could point to some he had known who had greatly injured their own moral character by indulging the habit he so strongly condemned. His ability as a critic was acknowledged, and not a few authors submitted their manuscripts to his



revision. He was a tried and trusted counsellor, an elder for whose words men waited; and in the management of public business and Circuit affairs combined great firmness with gentleness, prudence, and tact: often placed by official duties in delicate and difficult positions, he filled them with credit to himself and benefit to the Church: in cases of discipline he always combined generous kindness with the maintenance of order and integrity.

By his brethren in the ministry he was greatly esteemed, and his advice and direction both on private and Connexional matters were eagerly and constantly sought. His unobtrusive manners and retiring disposition often prevented his many excellences from being fully appreciated; he was best beloved where most thoroughly known. His kindness of heart was overflowing; and to the poor and needy he often bestowed assistance far beyond his means. His private life and conversation furnished abundant evidence of the charity which "thinketh no evil," and "hopeth all things." Among his personal characteristics *sincerity* was prominent; he was eminently free from all cant, all pretence, all meanness, all double-dealing, and these vices he utterly detested; even a reference to such things in conversation displeased him; but it was in the pulpit that his hatred of them was fully seen; usually calm, perhaps too calm, in his public manner, he was roused at once; his voice rose, and in deep impassioned tones he denounced fraud and falsehood in all their various forms with righteous severity and indignation. During the fifty-eight years in which he walked before the Church and the world as a Methodist preacher, his character was unblemished;—he never degraded a duty, nor betrayed a trust;—above reproach and above suspicion, he rejoiced in the esteem of good men, and prized it as a great treasure.

After occupying a place twenty years on the Conference Platform as "Letter Writer" and Journal Secretary," in

1855 Mr. Keeling was elected President of the Conference, held that year in Leeds. On his retiring from the office the following year, the late Dr. Bunting moved the vote of thanks to him, and in doing so said his conduct as President "had never been excelled." Three years later, at the Hull Conference, he was called upon to draw up the "character" of Dr. Bunting, which he did, as it now appears in the Minutes of 1858; and it was his pen that wrote the beautiful inscription on Dr. Bunting's monument in Liverpool-Road Chapel, Islington.

In 1863, severe affliction compelled Mr. Keeling to retire from the work he had loved so well, and fulfilled so faithfully. The Conference sent him an official letter on his retirement. We here give the letter with his characteristic reply.

WESLEYAN CONFERENCE, SHEFFIELD.

August 6, 1863.

TO THE REV. ISAAC KEELING.

Dear Brother,

It is with sincere and affectionate regret that the Conference has received intelligence of the failure of your health, and your proposed retirement from the more public station, which, by the grace of God, you have maintained for so many years, with singular wisdom and fidelity. The Conference gratefully recalls to mind your sound and mature instructions from the pulpit,—your Christian courtesy and ability in the offices of Superintendent and Chairman,—your exemplary industry and exactness as Assistant Secretary to the Conference,—your conduct when raised, as our President, to the highest post among us,—and the eminent services which you have rendered by your pen, in the preparation of important Conference documents and other papers.

Be assured that you carry into your comparative seclusion the full and honourable confidence of your brethren,

with their unaffected esteem and veneration. Our prayer is that God may spare your valuable life for years to come,—That He may comfort and strengthen you with the more plentiful supplies of the Holy Spirit,—that he may cause your remaining days to pass in undisturbed tranquility,—and that He may at length receive you, satisfied with life and good, to the joys of His own presence. We would add that you will ever be welcomed to your customary place in our assembly, as far as your health will allow you to attend, and that we shall, on all occasions, prize the counsels which you may yet have it in your power to give.

Believe us to be, very dear Brother,

On behalf of the Conference,

Yours faithfully in Christ,

GEORGE OSBORN, *President.*

JOHN FARRAR, *Secretary.*

BURNLEY, 11 AUG., 1863.

TO DR. OSBORN.

My dear Mr. President,

Three days ago, the very kind and comforting letter, signed by yourself and Mr. Secretary, on behalf of the Conference, filled me with deep and grateful emotion. I have been desirous to acknowledge your favour in a suitable manner, but am unable adequately and worthily to express what I think and feel.

Your affectionate assurances of remembrance in the prayers of so many devoted servants of Christ, and of a fraternal welcome in your annual assembly, if hereafter I should be enabled to attend, where for me to be present, is to have the pleasure of more valued friends than I can meet in any other earthly scene, are especially encouraging and consoling.

Trusting that divine direction and blessing may be richly imparted to you in all the deliberations and proceedings of the Conference, and the manifold cares and labours of the year,

I remain, my dear Mr. President,

Your most affectionate Brother in Christ,

ISAAC KEELING.

In the remaining six years of seclusion, pain and weariness, ever increasing feebleness, and sometimes acute suffering, tested the principles he had preached and cultivated. He steadfastly held by them to the end; the graces of the Holy Spirit shone forth brightly as his outer man decayed; patience, meekness, thankfulness, faith and love unfeigned, were abundantly manifested in his gradual decline, in his sick room, and on his dying bed. He was never able to preach again after the illness occasioned by cold caught on his seventy-fourth birthday, but he continued to care for the Church and the world with unabated interest; and his most earnest wish was to prepare a volume of thoroughly revised sermons for the press, as a means of usefulness that might continue when he should have passed away. To this he had been repeatedly urged by his brother ministers, and by influential members of his congregations in the different towns in which he had travelled; and he looked forward to the comparative rest of his "Super-numerary" years as a favourable opportunity for the accomplishment of this work, for which the multifarious duties of Superintendent of important Circuits, Chairman of Districts, and the like, left him little leisure in active life. His solicitude on this subject cost him many days of anxious thought, and many sleepless nights. It was touching to witness the resolute attempts he made from time to time to fulfil this long cherished wish, but his strength

was never equal to the whole undertaking; he was interrupted by a state of health that often compelled him to desist, always reluctantly, and always, till towards the last, with the hope of resuming his pen. He gave however his last finish to a few sermons, and the rest were subjected to repeated revisions.

Mr. Keeling's heavenly-mindedness, his tender sympathy, his wise counsels, his richly-stored memory; his instinctive perception and appreciation of the true and the beautiful in nature, character, literature, or art, which would often bring the tear to his eye, rendered him a most delightful and profitable companion to those who were privileged with his daily presence. His habitual reluctance to give trouble, his thankfulness for the smallest service or assistance, his unaffected humility and childlike simplicity endeared him to all within his influence. The preciousness of the soul, and the importance of seeking and obtaining salvation, were frequent topics of his conversation, and the subjects of many heart-stirring and affectionate letters to friends and relatives, who he feared were either unconcerned or undecided on these vital points. Thus he strove to work for God to the last, and to do good while he could. His comments on the Scriptures, and his prayers and thanksgivings at the family altar, were often apostolic in fulness of wisdom and grace. He continued to get down stairs, though later in the day, and with increasing difficulty, till February 12th, 1869, the completion of his eightieth year; when, after acknowledging the sparing mercy and manifold goodness of God, he retired to rest in more than usually cheerful spirits; but he was never again able to take his place at the family fireside, or to stand upon his feet. During the following six months of his life he verified the words of the Psalmist: "The years of man are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength

they be fourscore years; yet is their strength labour and sorrow."

"How do Thy mercies close me round!  
For ever be Thy name adored:  
I blush in all things to abound,  
The servant is above his Lord."

was frequently his reply to expressions of condolence on his state of weakness. "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth" (or, owneth) "them that trust in Him," seemed to be applied with peculiar force to his mind, and ever to yield him support and consolation. As long as his failing strength permitted, he loved to have the family gathered in his room of an evening, and after the reading of a portion of the Word of God by his daughter or son-in-law, there ascended from his bed of languishing, as from a sacred altar, an acceptable sacrifice of praise and thanks, of faith and love, while in tremulous accents, but with unshaken confidence, in dying tones, but with living faith, he commended them, himself and absent loved ones, to God, through Christ, often pleading especially for the *young*, his grandchildren. On the last occasion of the kind, he concluded thus, his voice sinking to a whisper from exhaustion: "Living or dying we are Thine; we would be wholly and only Thine; and do Thy will as angels do in heaven. Thou, God, art our merciful Father, our Almighty Saviour, our unfailing Comforter." As his son-in-law, with whom he resided, had to remove from Earby to Ripon, in April, great fear and perplexity were felt as to how Mr. Keeling would bear the journey: though it was hoped that if it could be safely accomplished, the change would prove beneficial, and revive his feeble powers of life for a time at least. To himself, in his state of conscious weakness, the prospect was formidable and distressing: but as the 10th of April, the time fixed upon for the removal, drew near, he seemed to have

committed all anxiety respecting it to his "sure defence;" and, in reference to it, repeatedly and calmly said, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble." The 9th of April was a day of storm and tempest, hail, rain and snow, and great misgivings were felt for the helpless invalid who had to travel on the morrow; but he himself still found assurance in the promise, "He owneth them that trust in Him." The morning dawn was mild and still, but misty. All concerned were thankful for this improvement on the weather of the previous day: but before the hour of departure arrived the sun shone forth powerfully and brilliantly, and ushered in the first warm and balmy day of the season. The best appliances that love and forethought and money could supply having been secured, the dreaded removal was accomplished with far more ease and comfort than any had dared to hope; and Mr. Keeling's first expression on being safely laid on his bed at Ripon was, "The Lord *is good*," while his countenance beamed with thankfulness. Some days of great prostration and languor followed the strain on his physical strength and nervous system; but when time and rest had subdued these symptoms, he began to enjoy the sweet air of Ripon from his open window, and to admire the glimpses of nature within view. But this improvement soon gave way to indications of further decline, and from continued drowsiness, he was often unable to converse for days together; or he would talk incoherently in the delirium of the fever induced by excessive weakness. At other times he was too prostrate to be able to talk or to listen. But his mind appeared to be kept in perfect peace. What expressions he did utter were those of thankfulness and trust. Nothing that could offend, nothing contrary to the things that are honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, passed through his lips. When neither overcome by sleep, nor excited by fever, his sufferings from weakness and exhaustion were

often severe. He would then frequently say, "*I must* be patient;" and truly his patience and fortitude were exemplary. On one occasion he said, "O how often I have prayed,

‘ A patient, a victorious mind,  
That life and all things casts behind,  
Ssprings forth obedient to Thy call,  
A heart that no desire can move,  
But still to adore, believe, and love,  
Give me, my Lord, my Life, my All ! ”

On his daughter saying, "Has not God answered your prayer, father?" he said, "Yes, I think He has;" and then, "*Oh yes ! I feel He does.*" "Our incomparable hymns," as he used to call them, were channels of rich consolation to him, and the medium by which he expressed much of his experience. "O Jesu, source of calm repose," "Jesus, my truth, my way," "Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness," "Now I have found the ground wherein," and "Jesu, Lover of my soul," were among the favourites often asked for when he was too weak to go through them himself. His room was always as a sacred retreat; nothing of the world seemed to find entrance there; and to those who delighted to tend him it was often a very Bethel of love and peace.

Beguiled to some extent by his calm endurance, the end came to those about him almost unawares. On Thursday, the 4th of August, a week before he died, he was wheeled on his couch, for a little change, into another bedroom overlooking the Crescent grounds, and being so placed that he could look out, he gently said, several times, as if thinking aloud, "Beautiful, very beautiful; nature and art combined." Shortly after, his kind and attentive pastor, the Rev. A. H. M'Tier, called to see him. He responded frequently to Mr. M'Tier's prayer with unusual warmth and animation. After his departure he seemed disposed for quiet, and assuring his daughters that he was comfortable and wanted nothing, he was left alone for a short time.



On one of them re-entering the room, she found him reciting that beautiful hymn,—

“O God of good the unfathomed sea,  
Who would not give his heart to Thee ? ” etc.,

with the utmost reverence and devoutness of manner. His little remaining strength now declined rapidly. On attempting to speak, his voice repeatedly failed him. “The daughters of music” were already “brought low;” “the silver cord was loosed,” and the “golden bowl” was about to be “broken.” His breathing became more and more laborious in the course of Monday and Tuesday, his countenance meanwhile in its heavenly serenity bespeaking the peace that ruled within.

He slept quietly for several hours on Tuesday night, but towards daylight on Wednesday morning he often seemed in danger of choking, and it was apparent to all and to himself that his end was very near. Exhausted nature sank to sleep at frequent intervals during the day, but when awake his mind was evidently clear and collected, and intensely solemnized by his consciousness of the nearness of the eternal world. Yet there was no dismay; and though unable to articulate, he made himself perfectly intelligible to those who watched his every look and expression. He listened with marked earnestness and comfort to the precious promises that were quoted to him; and gave unmistakable assurances that Jesus was present as his Saviour. As the night drew on, the labour of his breathing increased: he frequently closed his eyes and seemed unconscious, but opened them at the sound of a text of Scripture or one of his favourite hymns, and beamed inexpressible love and tenderness on those who each held a hand. At length, when to all appearance he had well nigh ceased to breathe, his eyes gradually turned upward and dilated, and glowed with a gaze of rapturous wonder, and reverence, and love, as if a glimpse were given

him of the unspeakable joy and glory that awaited him. Then directing a look upon his daughter intensely eloquent of satisfaction, assurance, and affection, his happy spirit returned to God who gave it. "Who can tell," says one, in writing to the bereaved afterwards, "what it was that met his dying, upward gaze? Something like that which Stephen saw, when he cried, 'Behold, I see heaven opened.'" Says another, in comforting the mourners, "Few men have thought so much or so calmly about the future state as your father, and few will have formed ideas of the heavenly existence at once so sublime and so subdued. Yet how far beyond all his conceptions is now the great reality! One could wish to know what such a mind as his has seen and felt already there!" The final resting-place of this departed saint in a vault under Trinity church, in the city of Ripon, is most appropriately inscribed with the words, so eminently fulfilled to him, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

The Rev. Wm. Willan, one of his long and intimate friends, preached an impressive and appropriate funeral sermon for Mr. Keeling at Ripon, in the evening of September 26th, 1869, and afterwards read the following able and characteristic letter which he had received from the Rev. Dr. Dixon.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I hasten to communicate my recollections of the late Rev. Isaac Keeling.

"Just before I left home to engage in my first Circuit, in 1812, Mrs. Beaumont, the mother of Dr. Beaumont, while on a visit to some of my friends, spoke very earnestly of a young preacher who had been stationed with them the previous year, as 'a remarkable young man;' contrasting him with another, and not to the advantage of the latter. This casual conversation impressed me with a very favourable idea of our departed friend: I kept my attention fixed upon him, and my ear open to receive any inti-

mation of his progress; but I did not meet with him till 1827, at the celebrated Leeds Special District-Meeting in that town, on the organ question: he was secretary, and the resolutions and documents were written by him. At this meeting our acquaintance commenced, which in the course of years ripened into a sincere friendship.

“I do not know the circumstances attending his conversion, but have no doubt of its reality or genuineness as a work of God. This may be inferred from the excellence of his religious character, sustained through a long series of years, and under various, and some of them painful, circumstances. When we see all the graces of Christian life developed in its progress, we may be assured that those graces do not spring from human nature, but are the certain results of Divine grace conferring its privileges and producing its regenerating effects. ‘Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?’

“No doubt Mr. Keeling was a believer in the inspired writings, and all the verities of Christian truth; but his faith was not manifested in enthusiastic bursts of fervid feeling and ecstatic joy. It seemed to form itself into profound, and perhaps we may say, sublime reason; hence his religious life was not an up and down course of joy and sorrow, but an uniform and steady perseverance in all the ways of God.....

“Outside observers would very greatly mistake in thinking, possibly, that he was of a cold and phlegmatic temperament; he was in truth a man of very warm affections; one single shake of his hand, or the slightest intercourse with him, would remove such a delusion: and the constancy of his friendship, as I have proved for many years, was as remarkable as its ardour.

“His morality was perfect; truth, justice, purity, sincerity, and good-will were most conspicuous in his character. Had Seneca been converted, and his ‘Morals’ transfused

by the spirit of Christianity, he would not have been a bad representative of Mr. Keeling, who it seems very likely had made himself familiar with the writings of that Stoic philosopher, as well as with the lives of Plutarch; but the remarkable feature in his moral texture was seen in his fondness for the Proverbs of Solomon and Ecclesiastes, which he never forsook; but dug continually in those mines of sacred truth to the end of his days.

“Mr. Keeling had a lively perception of the beautiful, especially in composition, and was himself a poet of no mean order. He was also a critic and a great master of language and style. A wrong word, or faulty structure of a sentence, he would detect in a moment; and his efforts to correct the language of men in common conversation were almost amusing. But the leading faculty of Mr. Keeling’s mind was analytical. In his examination of an author or a book this was most conspicuous. With himself every word contained an idea, and every sentence a spiritual or moral axiom. The quality he looked for in the authors he read. He would have consigned to the limbo of eternal silence a vast amount of what is called the ‘literature of the day.’

“As a preacher, he was not, as the term goes, ‘popular,’ not being the master of an impassioned eloquence. While those who went to hear for the edification of their souls would receive great good, those who went to the house of God merely to have their taste and fancy gratified, would be dull enough under one of his sermons. To a working man, whom I know, I said, ‘Do you remember Mr. Keeling being in this Circuit?’ His reply was, ‘O yes;’ and then mentioning some qualities which he thought Mr. Keeling did not possess, he remarked, ‘but he gave *good instruction*.’ These two words are an exact description of his preaching. A discourse was with him thinking aloud; and was neither more nor less than just talking wisdom for an hour. The

sermon was the exact expression of the mind and heart of the man.

“ He never delivered a written sermon, nor one from memory. I recollect that at Dudley, when the Birmingham District-Meeting was held there, on his preaching one of his excellent discourses, the brethren requested him to publish it, supposing he had the manuscript in his pocket. He drew out a little scrap, saying that was all he had of it ; nor was the publication ever forthcoming.

“ On the whole, Mr. Keeling may be pronounced a perfectly original preacher ; no man was his model any more than he could become the model of another. His preaching was like his mind—unlike that of any one else. Both as a man and as a minister, he was a Solon in the universal hubbub of platform and pulpit oratory.”

The lines that follow are from the pen of the Rev. W. B. Pope, and may fitly close this memorial of one of the excellent of the earth.

“ It gives me pure satisfaction to recall the particulars of my occasional intercourse with Mr. Keeling in Southport. It had not been my privilege to know him before ; but from the first day of our acquaintance his character made a deep impression on my mind. By degrees he became a study which interested me more and more to the last. I had never met with a man so far gone in years retaining so lively an interest in things around him : keeping up correspondence, copying his own letters, attending to the common concerns of a householder, and mindful of every obligation of life. His dignity, tranquillity, and purity of spirit, I admired and revered, in common with all who knew him. But I had an opportunity of observing what only few saw : the singular clearness of his perceptions, vigour of his intellect, and alertness of his theological faculty. He began, partly, I hope, at my instigation, to re-write some of his chaste, symmetrical, and well-composed ser-

mons ; and, had he not been a slow worker, and reduced to very short hours, would have prepared a great number for the press. If after I lost sight of him the daily line was added, and enough was finished for separate publication, the volume would be a most excellent and profitable one.

“ Mr. Keeling had at command, and always at a friend’s service, an inexhaustible treasury of remembrances, especially Methodistical, extending over more than half a century. He was a slow but steady talker, and had a rare faculty of imprinting upon the mind of his listener, in a manner not soon to be forgotten, the scenes of the distant past. His biographical reminiscences, and incidents of Methodist history, and anecdotes of his contemporaries, were deeply interesting ; and communicated with such artlessness, generosity of sentiment, and perfect freedom from self-consciousness or asperity, as made it a delight to converse with him. It was hardly possible to hear him long without thinking of the Apostle’s text : *In malice be ye children, in understanding be ye men.* Naturally he was elevated and noble-minded ; and grace had made him perfectly charitable and pure.

“ I remember also being much impressed by his blessed preparation for death, and confidence in the anticipation of the future. At times it appeared to me that I should have the opportunity of witnessing his departure ; and I used to muse on what would probably be the characteristics of his end. From the accounts I have received it was just such a noble and gracious close of a long Christian career as I supposed it would be. Circumstances removed father Keeling from Southport ; and I can recall my reflections after taking leave of him in the train. I felt that I had lost one whom I never visited without profit, and who would be always hallowed in my memory as one of the noblest examples of sanctified old age I had ever known.”

## LETTERS.

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10, HARPUR STREET,  
28th Sept., 1841.

REV. WM. ATHERTON.

My dear Sir,

In transmitting to you Mr. E——'s Treatise, I take the opportunity of also communicating the observations which have been suggested to me by the perusal of this work, or by the circumstances under which I have examined it.

To certain false ornaments and affected phrases in the style of this Treatise, I have a strong aversion, which I have freely expressed in pencil notes on the margin of the MS. The objectionable passages do not, however, form any large part of the work, though they present provoking impediments to that continuous attention which the subject and the sentiments justly claim. For many years I have observed with much concern, that many juvenile writers and speakers, (not including any member of the Book Committee) have recourse, for the elevation of their style, and the display of their literary pretensions, to an eager and indiscriminate adoption of all the most crude and new-fangled combinations of language that have been sanctioned by the caprice of recent writers or orators. They seem to think the newest fashions must be the most elegant in phrases as in dress. The effect is to give an ostentatious air to the compositions in which such strange feathers are exhibited, and to call off attention most unpleasantly from the sense to the expression.

The peculiarity which in this Treatise, has most frequently offended my sense of congruity, is the use of the

possessive Pronoun, *Its*, in a manner which makes it stand for the thing possessed or done, instead of the possessor or doer. *Its perusal*, *Its bestowment*, *Its experience*, *Its attainment*, etc., are expressions of a class which the writer appears to use by preference whenever he has opportunity to do so. I think them remarkably illogical and nonsensical phrases, but persons whose judgment I respect, appear to regard them with more favor. The increasing commonness of them might give new occasion for an essay on the question—why nonsense, especially in the form of fine writing, so often escapes detection with both authors and their readers.

From a highly respectable quarter, I have been reminded that a recent author of reputation, ends the title of a book with some such phrases as—"designed to facilitate *its* performance," meaning the performance of some duty. There are other late examples, especially among ourselves; though I do not recollect any to which I can now refer. As this manner of using or abusing, the possessive pronoun appears to me to be what no examples can authorise, in opposition to such laws of language as are derived from the permanent relation of ideas, I shall take the liberty to occupy a little space in endeavouring to make the impropriety of it manifest.

The word in question, being one of a class, including *my*, *thy*, *his*, *her*, *its*, *your*, *their*,—must keep the bounds of its associates, and be employed like them. Hence, as *HIS performance*, is something which *he* performs, *ITS performance*, must be something which *It performs*, not in which it *is* performed. If *HER* attainment is something which *she* has attained, *ITS* attainment must be something which *It* has attained. But the intended meaning in these phrases as used in this Treatise, is not what *It* performs or attains; but *It* stands for the very thing performed or attained. But what pretension can this little word have to



personate by turns the possessor and the property, the agent and the subject?

In the preface of this book, one sentence begins with, *ITS perusal*. Now *HIS* or *HER* perusal would mean *His* or *Her* act of perusing; and why must *ITS* have a latitude to mean any thing else, in conjunction with *perusal*, but *its* act of perusing, not its *state* of *being* perused? *His*, *Her*, and *Its*, are closely parallel branches from one stem, differing in gender alone. When we say, *HIS* perusal, the expression does not signify the perusal of *Him*, as if *He* was the object perused, the man instead of the book. *His*, stands for the reader, and the book is the object that passively receives the act of reading. And if we say, *Its* perusal, the grammatical arrangement and relation of the words are exactly the same as when we say *HIS* perusal, though the intended meaning is quite otherwise. *Its perusal* is not equivalent to *the perusal of it*, any more than *His* perusal to *the perusal of Him*. *Its* still stands grammatically, *for the reader*, as something which peruses; and yet if you ask, *What is perusal?* the same *It* must do duty again. The book is thus made to read itself.

It is already admitted that modern examples may be pleaded for this most incongruous use of the neuter possessive pronoun; but no number nor weight of recent authorities will prevent me from seeing in such phraseology a ridiculous jumble, a misty confusion of the established relations of words and ideas. If such forms of speech were idiomatic they would be frequently exemplified, which certainly they are not among those who write and speak plain English, and among the standard authors from the Reformation downwards. If *ITS perusal*, *ITS attainments*, *ITS performance*, had been put before our Translators of the Scriptures, or the Compilers of the Liturgy,—or before Dryden, Pope, Addison, or Swift,—or before Goldsmith, Johnson, Junius, or Burke,—or before any of the judicious

and classical Wesleys,—such phrases would have suggested to their minds ideas about a learned pig, or a dancing bear, or some student, agent, or performers of doubtful gender; leading them to ask, What sort of a peruser or performer can *It* be or signify? I do not believe that an example of such phrases can be found in any of the fine writers before 1800; nor that any of them would ever have dreamed of *Its* undergoing such a Protean transformation as would enable it to serve with equal promptitude and assurance for either subject or object, the performer or the performance, the possessor or the property.

I well understand the motive and excuse for these ambiguous transmutations, which, however, is not very respectable. A clause or a sentence ending with the short abrupt monosyllable, *It*, is considered not euphonical. But it does not follow that there is only one way of avoiding such a termination; and were there only one, an author whose subject is the great salvation, should be superior to the effeminate taste that would make the unworthy sacrifice of sense to sound.

Of Mr. E—'s Treatise in general, I have a high opinion. His great subject is the Gospel of our salvation; which, in his pages, is treated evangelically, experimentally, and practically; and so comprehensively as to render the work a compact and interesting body of divinity in a hortatory form. In the earlier parts there appears a degree of straining for effect, and a use of overwrought phraseology; which sometimes results in broken metaphor, and rather increases than relieves the doctrinal dryness of the introductory portion. Sometimes, also, he seems inclined to push an argument too far. But he becomes more fluent and natural as his work advances. His readers will find him always able and often eloquent. He displays his subject in a great variety of aspects and relations. He writes with a serious earnestness, with a fulness and spirituality of

thought indicative of deep religious feeling and solemn meditation. In addressing the understanding, he also gratifies the imagination, and moves and searches the conscience. His work is modestly addressed chiefly to the young; but an aged disciple might profitably read it, for spiritual refreshment and instruction in righteousness.

Often while reading the MS., I have wished there had been an outline prefixed as a table of contents; and am accordingly of opinion that such an addition would be convenient and acceptable to readers generally. Having given these views of the work, it may be anticipated that I recommend the publication of it, with a hope that the Author, either personally or by commission, will remove its verbal blemishes.

SOUTHPORT, 1st March, 1865.

MY DEAR MARY ANNE.

You have repeatedly asked me to write to you, and I have as frequently wished to do so; but there has always hitherto been some hinderance, in addition to that habitual reluctance to write letters, which I remember to have felt more than sixty years ago, though I have somehow been made to write so many. The wear and tear of seventy-six years has not lessened the old difficulty, which is like my long standing aversion to taking a walk for the sake of walking, is always ready and does not wait for any outward occasion or impulse. I suppose you will not soon forget the agony of effort to me, which our removal from the cottage involved. Though there have been since some slight remissions of the strain, much of my time has been passed in a state of uneasy tension, through the continuous striving to become settled in our new *halting place*. Pain and weakness are daily, or I may perhaps say hourly, reminding me that "*here we have no continuing city.*" And I feel that "*here*" there is no secure halting place for

spiritual vigilance, while I “seek one to come.” Yet we have much to be thankful for in the assemblage of comforts in this small house. The kindness of Burnley friends has not ceased : and L.’s contriving and tasteful industry have rendered our rooms, not merely comfortable but elegant. I have keenly felt the withering severity of this winter ; and our most careful appliances have not availed to keep out the cold. This winter, like all its predecessors will pass away ; and in a few weeks we may expect that arrangements for guarding against heat will be required ; but my experience of the formidable influence of the severe atmospheric changes, which accompany winter, and which harass and endanger my enfeebled frame,—warns me impressively that winter will come again.

“O ! what a mighty change  
 Shall Jesu’s suff’rers know,  
 While o’er the happy plains they range  
 Incapable of woe !  
 In that eternal day  
 No clouds nor tempests rise :  
 There gushing tears are wiped away  
 For ever from their eyes.”

O ! to be ready for that bright and secure tranquillity. But I have to say with Paul and John Wesley—“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” I have continual need to watch, and pray, and strive ; to walk humbly with God ; and to make sure that I *abide* in Him, in Christ, as one of His living branches. *Without Him, I can do nothing.* My habitual experience is expressed in the Hymn, beginning on Page 409, Jesu, my truth, my way, &c., to the end,—and in the 130th Psalm, through all the verses. I hold these views seriously and earnestly.

As I draw nearer to the everlasting state, my love for my children increases, with regrets that I have not done more and better for them both temporally and spiritually,

and it is to me a weighty consideration that I have besides my nine children, so many grandchildren, and that they are ransomed sinners, whose endless lot must depend on *working out* their own salvation with *fear and trembling*. By *working out*, I understand, carrying out a work begun, to the stage of completion; and I think you have heard me state—that the only time I ever saw the late Sir Robert Peel, which was at Exeter Hall in 1840, his manner in connexion with the occasion, gave me a new idea of the “fear and trembling” required in the business of our salvation. At a meeting of the African Civilization Society, got up by Yowell Buxton, Prince Albert was induced to take the Chair, and Sir Robert consented to move the first resolution, tendering thanks to the Prince for taking the Chair. Many other personages of great eminence were present. The Prince had stipulated that a table should be placed in front of the Chair. When the meeting commenced, Dr. Beecham, who was in a convenient post of observation from the first, discovered that the Prince had wanted the table, that he might place his hat upon it, and that in the inside of his hat were notes of the short speech he had prepared, which was a very good one, and which he delivered with graceful ease and self-possession. When Sir Robert rose, in a moment he appeared quite transformed; his countenance and his whole frame were dilated with resolute effort and strong emotion. All the muscles of his face were distended; he supported himself with his stick and trembled from head to foot. I suppose he had not previously been present at any time in an Exeter Hall Meeting: the place was new to him, and untried by him as a speaking place. It seemed to me that he measured the scene with his eye. It was then a very bad place for any speaker, who had not a telling voice. The first words he uttered were so decidedly pronounced, as to shew—that he was resolved to be well heard. I accounted for his

trembling, by the fact that his nerves were obviously strung up to intense earnestness of purpose. Every thing about him seemed to say—"On this peculiar and important occasion. I *must* not and *will* not fail." And he did not fail. Immediately after the nervousness of the first phrases he uttered, his speech flowed on like a deep and smooth stream. Addressing the Prince, as his Royal Highness, he said—You have auspicated and sanctified your first public appearance among us, by giving your countenance and support to an enterprise of liberal and enlightened philanthropy. Some of us were startled with the word "*auspicated*," and took it for the moment as a happy coinage of his own; but on examination, found that it was already authorized. He trembled as a Christian may well tremble in view of his solemn life-work of *holiness* unto the Lord—not with cowardly fear, but with absorbing earnestness of determination, on an occasion in which failure would have been intolerable. With much love

I am,

Your affectionate father,

ISAAC KEELING.

SOUTHPORT, 23rd Sept., 1865.

MY DEAR DR. DIXON.

Many years ago I had the pleasure of your company and that of several other ministers at Bristol, during the sittings of Conference. After your departure we found a volume containing the life and works of the excellent David McNicol, edited by yourself. We concluded you had left it silently, but not unwittingly, to avoid any ceremony in presenting it, or receiving acknowledgments. I have very often thought of this in your absence, and have wished that I had mentioned it to you, but have strangely forgotten to advert to it in any way when I have been present with you. Yet the fact is that

I have felt doubtful whether I should not have replaced the book in your hands as one you had mislaid, and which could not properly be retained without your expressed permission. My interest in this question is now increased by the circumstance that, being in great weakness, and tottering on the road to the grave, I have Dr. McNicol as my kind and skilful medical friend, and I learn that he regrets to be without a copy of his father's life and works. Now the drift of this awkward and long deferred explanation is—that I should be gratified in being assured that you will kindly excuse my having kept the volume so long, and that you will authorise me to present it to Dr. McNicol. Perhaps you will either think me unaccountably deficient according to one view of the case, in leaving this matter so long unmentioned, or otherwise over scrupulous in recalling it now; but I cannot help these two facts—that it has often happened to me to have forgotten what I have really desired to remember, and that I am uneasy till such crooked things are made straight.

You may perhaps remember that when I had the pleasure of your company at Bristol, Mr. Atherton, the President at that Conference was the guest of Mr. Willan, who was one of my colleagues at Bristol. It has been a rich treat to me to have the volume he has so recently published, containing sermons and outlines of Mr. Watson's from a manuscript book given to Mr. Willan by Mr. Atherton, containing also the Essay on Mr. Watson by the Rev. Jonathan Crowther, and your own masterly remarks on the character and writings of Mr. Watson. A verbal answer from you by Mr. Haigh will oblige your truly sympathizing friend,

ISAAC KEELING.

AUGHTON ROAD, SOUTHPORT,  
21st Nov., 1865.

THE REV. WM. WILLAN.

My dear Friend,

I think you will perceive, on reading the enclosed paper, that I have been thinking and writing earnestly ; but I rather doubt whether I have succeeded in producing what you desired or expected. If I have missed the mark, freely give me your views. It seems to me that what I have written is a sort of additional essay, on Watson and his outlines. The one I refer to, as being the first I examined, is that on the claims and rewards of God's service : of others I could say as much, as they strongly excite my admiration.

My daughter unites in kind regards to Mrs. Willan, yourself, and family, with yours most sincerely,

ISAAC KEELING.

I first heard Mr. Watson, early in September of 1815. In the morning at half-past nine, I had preached at Buxton ; and after procuring a respectable supply for the evening service, I walked ten miles over the mountains to Macclesfield, in the afternoon of a hot summer's day, to hear Mr. Watson. The effort was richly repaid. Before the service I was informed by his host, that he had a severe cold, and was scarcely equal to the exertion of speaking in the Sunderland Street Chapel. When he commenced, it was apparent that the state of his voice was a hinderance to easy utterance. But the sermon was one of surpassing clearness, ease and power ; and has not been excelled by anything I have heard since ; except by masterpieces of the same kind.

The thoughts were natural, but not obvious ; the language select and noble, with a free and flowing ease. There was a pervading and exquisite appropriateness, without any



appearance of effort : precision and perspicuity were happily combined ; not with a laboured exactness, but with a grand simplicity. Not such a simplicity as may be cheaply shewn in disposing common and scanty materials ; but rather that which results from *such an arrangement* of important parts, distinctly conceived, and placed according to their proper relation to each other, as, amidst a rich and rare fulness of luminous and orderly statements, preserves *that air of spontaneousness*, which puts the hearer or reader at ease, by presenting the *substance* of valuable information, or the *pith* of earnest and effective thinking ; unembarrassed with the needless detail of merely formal and arbitrary method, and disencumbered from whatever would be trivial or irrelevant.

In the eighteen following years of Mr. Watson's life, I heard him repeatedly ; and may be said to have become somewhat accustomed to his style of thought, expression, and delivery ; as well as to his choice and treatment of subjects. He was as free as possible from anything which could fairly be called *mannerism* ; but he was as much distinguished by his grand style in preaching as Michael Angelo in painting. A few days after his election as President at the Liverpool Conference, in 1826, he had an appointment, in the previously printed Conference plan, to preach in Brunswick Chapel, irrespective of his official sermon as President. He made no difficulty of the additional appointment, which he fulfilled (I think) on a Wednesday evening. The subject was "But go thou thy way till the end be ; for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." Immediately after service, I met with Dr. Townley, who, speaking of the sermon, said *he thought human talent could not go beyond that*.

Mr Willan has done good service by reprinting the two admirable Essays on Mr. Watson's character and writings : and the Outlines recorded by the tasteful friend of Mr.

Atherton, render no disservice to the great reputation of Mr. Watson. The first of them which I examined is wonderfully impressive. It is manifestly an outpouring from the same mind that produced the sermon on *the Spirit of Adoption*. It ascends the loftiest regions of sublime thought, as by the bold and easy movements of an eagle's wing; and in a few plain words of marvellous light and power, at once convinces the judgment, searches the conscience, and fills the imagination with grand and solemn conceptions. Several of the sketches are similarly instinct with a startling vitality. Brief, pungent, and vivid,—they are in the highest degree *suggestive*. As different as possible from fleshless skeletons, they grapple with the will, alarm the fears, and animate the heart, of the thoughtful reader. They wield the power of appropriate words with a dazzling and subduing mastery; shewing a command of language quite the reverse of verbosity, and such as those writers or speakers who have frequent recourse to loose, current phraseology, strive for in vain.

After the sermon at Macclesfield in Sept., 1815, I and two other ministers, accompanied him to the place where he had to wait for a conveyance. While he was thus waiting, one of us—the late Rev. John James—requested his opinion on methods of preparing for the pulpit. His reply was frank and unreserved. He said he had tried all ways; writing much, or little, or none; and that what he found most convenient was such an outline as might easily be written on a quarto letter sheet, folded in four leaves 8vo., USING EXTEMPORE ADORNING. The last clause is in the very words he uttered in my presence. Mr. James mentioned a colleague of Mr. Watson at Hull, who said that at Beverley his own congregations were quite as large as Mr. Watson's. "Yes," said Mr. W., "some men think they thunder and lighten every time they preach."

SOUTHPORT, 4th November, 1865.

MY DEAR SARAH.

Many times of late I have had earnest and solemn thoughts about my many children and grandchildren. They have to make their way in this life through a world full of difficulties and temptations; but, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is, that they may be saved. I rejoice to believe that you are yourself awake to the great importance of eternal things, and that you are striving to train up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I wish to suggest the great value of the three volumes of Watson's Sermons which Dr. Chadwick had from me. I consider them the best sermons in our language. The Rev. W. Willan has lately published a supplementary volume, containing Outlines and Sermons by the Rev. Richard Watson, taken in Short-hand by a tasteful admirer; with two admirable Essays on his character and writings. I have read most of the sketches, and with great surprise and pleasure; and with an increased sense of the value of his works and precious remains. I consider our Hymn Book second only to the Scriptures; and one of the most instructive and impressive of Commentaries. I trust you may long be spared to your children. When I have looked at the sad history of many of the Jewish kings, even those who had good fathers, it has seemed to me very likely that they had ignorant and thoughtless mothers; and a neglected childhood. To my own mother I owe much in many ways. I should be glad to send you our smaller periodicals—the Miscellany, Teacher's Magazine, Early Days, and Juvenile Offering, of which I have many in hand, and they are all interesting: they shall be sent by the first opportunity. As to my books generally I wish to place them in the hands of those of my children and grandchildren who are likely to read them and to prize them. I have made a little progress in appropriating them by writing names in

several volumes, but there are still many about which I am at a loss how best to dispose of them.

We—that is I and Lucy—are very glad to have Etty with us. I think she is gaining something as to health and information ; and that it will be well for her to stay here as long as you can spare her. By little at a time, I learn much about your careful training of your children, and the success with which God blesses your endeavours. I feel more for you all than I can express ; above all I am concerned for the fact—that my many children and grandchildren have souls, which will either be *saved* or *lost for ever*. I have to work out my *own* salvation with fear and trembling ; and to acknowledge with Wesley, Hymn 292.

“Every moment, Lord, I want  
The merit of Thy death.  
Never shall I want it less.”

I am very weak ; but as well as I can expect to be at seventy-seven. I have great reason to be thankful,—to walk humbly with God—and to trust in His mercy for *me* and *mine*.

Your loving father,

ISAAC KEELING.

SOUTHPORT, 2nd Jan., 1866.

MY DEAR BASSETT,

For a long time I have been desiring to write to you but have been hindered in many ways. Recent illness has made my life hang in doubt, and has rendered me more anxious to write without delay.

You will remember that when I last wrote I passed by other subjects, that I might request your attention to *one* especially. I hear with interest of your energy and success in your profession ; but when I think of the endless life to come, my deepest feelings yearn over you and yours.

Though my time and thoughts have been occupied more or less about sacred things for sixty years, I do not feel that to be any ground of confidence. On the contrary, I review that long period, with a humiliating sense of unworthiness and unfaithfulness, for want of a closer walk with God. I have still to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling; and my conclusion is—

“ For ever here my rest shall be,  
 Close to thy bleeding side ;  
 This all my hope, and all my plea,  
 ‘ For me the Saviour died !’  
 My dying Saviour, and my God,  
 Fountain for guilt and sin,  
 Sprinkle me ever with thy blood,  
 And cleanse, and keep me clean !  
 Wash me, and make me thus thine own !  
 Wash me, and mine thou art !  
 Wash me, but not my feet alone,  
 My hands, my head, my heart !  
 The atonement of thy blood apply,  
 Till faith to sight improve ;  
 Till hope in full fruition die,  
 And all my soul be love !”

I never now hear of a death without being reminded of the fact—that a departed spirit is *saved* or *lost*, *once for all*, and FOR EVER.

Though I have other cares, and some of them weighty, the recollection that I have nine living children and ten grandchildren, causes me very serious concern, on account of the snares and temptations through which they will have to pass; and on account of the uncertainty whether they will so attend to the teaching of the Word and Spirit of God, as to flee from the wrath to come, and to make Christ their timely and sure refuge. I often wish very earnestly, that I had been able to do more and better for each of you, both temporally and spiritually. Yet I do not forget that with much to be thankful for, many and

precious mercies, I have encouragement for prayer and hope. I commend to you, as hand-books for habitual and careful reading, the Bible and Hymn Book. I prize them more than ever. The Hymns are in many instances spirited and faithful renderings of Divine testimonies. You have some notion of the degree in which I value the book of Proverbs. The following words, from the third chapter, 5—7 verses are worthy of most thoughtful attention and claim implicit submission. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil." And the gracious sayings of Jesus, Matthew xi. 29, 30, are words of truth and power, and loving kindness. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Your affectionate Father,

ISAAC KEELING.

EARBY, NEAR SKIPTON,

15th December, 1866.

MY DEAR DR. HANNAH,

Your very kind and cordial note of September 19th was refreshing to my spirit, as, "Iron sharpeneth iron." The sympathy of *old* friends is especially precious; yet I do not forget, and sometimes suggest to others, as occasion may serve, that it is also right and good to keep the heart open for the kindness of new friends—subject to the caution, "Prove all things."

I am fervently desirous to accomplish what I intimated to our President respecting the revising of my manuscripts; and am often trying to do something: but my weakness is such that I can do very little at any one time. Recently

I fell helplessly from mere want of strength to stand during dressing. This failure taught me the need of special precaution. Other circumstances, numerous and inevitable family anxieties—arising from the necessities temporal and spiritual—of children and grandchildren, are continually reminding me of *my* and *their* dependence on Him “who careth” for us. Through many distractions I look to Him whose word “liveth and abideth for ever.”

By the removal of Mr. Bowers and Mr. W. M. Bunting, I have lost highly valued personal friends.

“ Friend after friend departs ! ”

“ Wherefore in never ceasing prayer,  
My soul to Thy continual care  
I faithfully commend !  
Assured that Thou through life shalt save  
And shew Thyself beyond the grave  
My everlasting friend.”

More and more do I prize our Hymn-book : not only for its surpassing devotional poetry, but, as a sound and spirited commentary on the *words* which are *spirit* and *life*.

I take this opportunity to say—that I was glad to see that portion of Conference intelligence which reported our President’s caution against *complimentary prayers*. Such prayers have often pained me—as being at once sanctimonious and fulsome,—flagrantly offending against godly order, in going round by the Almighty to flatter a fellow-creature,—a gross impropriety, offensive to good sense, and inconsistent with godly simplicity.

I congratulate you that, after long and honourable service, in a very important position, you are still able to accomplish so much public duty on great occasions, such as those recently reported in the *Watchman*.

There is one clause in your very kind note of September 19th, which has constrained me to humbling recollection and self-examination. You say, “ The God whom you have

so long and faithfully served in the Gospel of His Son." Now, though I am conscious of having *endeavoured* to know and to preach the Gospel,—of having resisted many plausible attempts to pervert it,—and of having tried to administer its godly discipline to the best of my judgment and ability, I cannot place any confidence in my own faithfulness; being, as I am, ashamed before God of my *unfaithfulness*.

Under a sermon by Edward Jackson in 1805, from Psalm xxi. 4. "I said, Lord be merciful unto me : heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee"—I was stripped of self-righteousness; and convinced that, though I had been graciously and providentially restrained from vice, I was so far guilty before God that I must not dare to say, even to a gross sinner, "Stand by thyself,—I am holier than thou." Under the same sermon I was convinced that Christ is the *only* and the *safe* refuge; that delay in coming to Him was causeless and could avail nothing; that therefore it would be a waste of time and effort to try any thing else; that his gracious word declares all things are ready *now*, then why should I not come *now*? It was usual with E. Jackson to say, in preaching, "Make haste! man! make haste!" The hymn which closed the service contained the verse, "My God is reconciled," etc. That verse filled my thoughts, on my way home that Sunday evening, in a manner which at the time seemed to me a testimony of acceptance. The suddenness and apparent easiness of the change was long an occasion of doubts and fears, and of anxious self-inspection, with a careful reading of Wesley's sermons as an earnest enquirer. I had previously been unsettled by Paine's Age of Reason, yet still not daring to give up prayer for Divine guidance. I had then often and earnestly pondered a work of Robert Dodsley's, said to be his best,—which I first saw in a form which I think must have been long out of print,—as a code of moral sentences,



professing to be traced to the Grand Lamas of Thibet. During my unsettled and wavering state of speculative unbelief, I had been trying, *of course vainly*, to frame my feelings and conduct according to the plausible maxims of Dodsley's Economy of Human Life. In the midst of these efforts I had been mortified by the discovery that my passions were often rebelling against my high-toned views of moral excellence; that in fact, I was rolling the stone of Sisyphus. It was in the midst of such mental conflicts, and of the desponding weariness they produced, that I heard Edward Jackson, at Burslem, on a Sunday evening, in the summer of 1805. I am aware that my experience was then very crude,—that I was but a babe in Christ, and that my long struggles with doubts and fears were partly owing to weakness of faith, and partly to unfaithfulness to the little light and faith I had.

I still feel much as I did under that sermon at Burslem, but with an increased sense of the *divine majesty* and *mercy* of our crucified Lord, as nobly exhibited in the glorious hymn, beginning

“ O God ! of good the unfathomed sea,”

and with feelings which say—with the 436th hymn

“ Never will I remove, Out of thy hands my cause,  
But rest in thy redeeming love, And hang upon thy cross.”

I have been much interested and instructed by your excellent and appropriate Funeral sermon for Mr. W. M. Bunting, which is worthy of yourself and of the solemn occasion.

I was sorry to learn from your last that Mrs. Hannah is a confirmed invalid. It is a prized comfort that she is still spared to you.

With affectionate regards to Mrs. Hannah and yourself,

I remain, my dear Dr. Hannah,

Your sincere old friend,

ISAAC KEELING.

EARBY, NEAR SKIPTON,  
6th June, 1866.

MY DEAR MRS. BOWERS.

This morning I received the mournful memorials of my departed friend, one of my early friends, among contemporary Wesleyan Ministers, the Rev. John Bowers. Though the sad accounts of his suffering state previous to my removal from Southport made the probable termination chiefly a question of time, it was yet with a feeling next to painful surprise that I heard from Dr. McNicol of his departure. Mr. Bowers and I first met at a District meeting, held at Longton in May 1815, where he was in his second year at Northwich and I in my first at Buxton. We have ever since been confiding friends; often in positions to be acting together; once placed by the acts of others in *appearance only* as rivals, but never having had a personal misunderstanding. I had a first opportunity of observing his admirable skill as a reader at a Liverpool Conference in 1820, and the next specimen of his powers as a speaker which I had the pleasure of witnessing was in a Bible Meeting at Wakefield, with Lord Milton, afterwards Earl Fitzwilliam, in the Chair. Mr. Bowers was then in the Wakefield Circuit. His manly speech was remarkable for clearness and appropriateness, and for the becoming and gentlemanly ease and force with which it was delivered. Interesting recollections of our frequent and lively intercourse mingled with the diversified memories of fifty-one years, crowd upon me. These are to me cherished remembrances of a Christian friend; whose candour and constancy I greatly prized; whose delicate fidelity, in circumstances which were a real test of friendship, I hold in honour; and whose joys I hope to share in the endless life to come. I began to write previous to the date above, but have been hindered by severe illness. With kind regards to yourself

and your bereaved family, whom I commend to their father's God, believe me

My dear Mrs. Bowers,  
Your sympathizing friend,  
ISAAC KEELING.

EARBY, NEAR SKIPTON,  
31st Dec., 1866.

TO MRS. R. R. KEELING.

My dear Sister,

I have been desiring and intending to write to you from the day I received the Funeral Card, announcing the removal of your son. The motto on the card—"With Christ which is far better,"—confirmed as it is by your interesting account of him in connexion with his brother's interview, is the key to a boundless store of consoling facts. To have such assurance of the eternal safety and felicity of a child, escaped from the incalculable perils and temptations of this world, is a precious and inexhaustible fund of comforting reflections. Everlasting things are the true realities. In my seventy-eighth year with increasing weakness, an habitual sense of the fact that my time is short; and with a memory crowded with recollections of the departed, I cordially sympathise with those who, like you, have committed beloved ones to the dust in solemn confidence that they are, "*with Christ.*"

Believe me,

Your affectionate brother,  
ISAAC KEELING.

EARBY, NEAR SKIPTON,  
15th March, 1867.

MY DEAR MR. JACKSON.

For several days past, I have been very desirous to convey to you some expression of the pleasure with

which I have looked over the six volumes of lives of early Preachers, which I obtained a few days ago. They are not entirely new to me : for I had read portions of them many years ago, in the old Magazines ; but it is refreshing to see them in their present collective form ; which I presume owes much of its completeness to your intimate acquaintance with Wesleyan documents, and your rare qualifications for combining, and illustrating the facts and traditions of Wesleyan times. What times were those ! They laboured and suffered, and we have entered into their labours. I am glad to observe that you have still the buoyant energy to undertake and to accomplish so much in the manner of your excellent centenary volume. I received a kind letter this morning from Mr. Naylor, who is still working hard in preaching, in attending meetings, etc., and, as formerly, indignant against precocious juvenile presumption and irregularity. From what he states about his health, I am rather apprehensive, as indeed *he* seems to be, of a decline in his long-enduring vigour. The last time I saw him, he walked with a large, long step like a young man. I am unable to cope with him or with you in any form of activity. I have a great desire to prepare something for our press ; but my weakness, combining with short and dark days and severe weather, limits and cripples my endeavours. Many recollections of my past years have faded : but I still have remembrances of the District Meeting in Bradford, at which we first met ; and where (after having written at fifteen, a poem, entitled “An Enquiry after Happiness,” which Mr. Edmondson transmitted to Mr. Benson, and which Mr. Rodda, with whom I dined at his own table, in London, about 1807, revised and recommended to the editor, so that it appeared in our Magazine, in 1809,) it seemed to be supposed that, because I delivered a sermon that would have read flowingly in print, I must, *of course*, have borrowed it from books. When I began this letter, I did not contem-

plate any reference to the Bradford District Meeting in 1814. But the impressions of that day were an occasion of long continued discouragement; to overcome which required years of comparatively successful effort, and still left painful memories. It may be partly owing to my natural diffidence that it has happened to me to be often misapprehended; so often as to be reminded by my own case, of a remark of Dr. Johnson, to the effect—that any one who is in a position to be frequently spoken of, will have his confidence in general history shaken, by the rumours about himself which will be obscurely circulated, till they reach his own ear; rumours which he knows to be untrue, and grossly inaccurate.

There are many things in my recollections for which I am ashamed and humbled before the Lord, and which constrain me to say—

“ Me with all my sins I cast  
On my atoning God.”

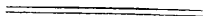
I remain, my dear Mr. Jackson,

With much affection,

Your sincere old friend,

ISAAC KEELING.

P.S.—I know nothing more likely than your *six volumes* to stir up the spirit of vital godliness among our people; if only a general reading of them can be secured. Zealous wealthy friends would do well to present sets of them to school libraries.



SERMONS.



# SERMONS.

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## THE WORTH OF THE SOUL.

“What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”—MATT. xvi. 26.

Two things are implied in these strong interrogations; as certain knowledge that no possible nor imaginable combination of the most perfect worldly enjoyments can ever amount to an equality with the worth of the soul; and a sure anticipation that to every thoughtful and sincere mind, this truth, when suggested, must appear indubitable. The bold supposition which Jesus makes in proposing these questions, places in a very striking light, the incomparable importance of future happiness, and the superiority of a religious over a worldly life. He is so certain of these facts, that, for the purpose of illustration, he allows us to imagine a case which never occurs, and is merely conceivable;—that one man should gain and enjoy the whole world:—and with such a case in view, he challenges us to say whether that *all* would compensate for the ruin of the soul.

If we form our estimate of temporal happiness, not from the vain outward shows, but from the sober realities of life; we must conclude that complete felicity on earth is but a dream of imagination;—that the sunshine of prosperity is often shadowed with clouds of calamity or discontent—that enjoyment is generally moderate, transient, cloying and unsatisfactory: while much of life is insipid, and much painful; the pains often severe, and sometimes lasting. We presume that the most remarkable success generally fails to verify the promises of hope, and to



silence the clamours of desire ; that some enjoyments are purchased with the surrender of others, and that the sacrifice is often made in vain. Industry, frugality, policy, self denial, vigilance and the spirit of enterprise, though combined and exerted with patient perseverance, are sometimes finally defeated by a trivial accident. Those whom the world calls happy, who are regarded with admiration and envy, have obtained only some few instruments of enjoyment ; and are liable to the attacks of a thousand evils, which foresight cannot prevent, which dignity cannot awe, which wealth cannot bribe, which amusement cannot dissipate, which power cannot repel, which expedients can seldom evade, or remedies remove. The general condition of worldly men is thus contracted, uncertain, and unsatisfying.

The reading of this passage reminds most persons that, it is an undeniable truth that no man ever did or ever can really gain the whole world. But if this be urged as an objection or limitation of the doctrine of the text, it is not applicable or pertinent truth. It is true indeed, but not to the purpose. Not what is probable or possible, but what is *conceivable*, is here presented for consideration. For in this sentence our Lord does not confine our view of life to its hard and vexatious realities. He permits us for the purpose of instructive comparison, to contemplate the false splendour of such scenes of human happiness as Hope displays to the ambitious, the covetous, the gay, and the young. He allows us to indulge imagination ; to behold in our mind's eye an assemblage of worldly advantages—lofty as pride, boundless as avarice, flattering as self-love, bright and glowing as the best days of youthful pleasure, and unruffled as the clear azure of a cloudless sky. He allows us to suppose one man accumulating enjoyments to the utmost extent of possibility ; and uniting in his own lot all the various means of delight, which are divided in

small shares even among the prosperous and the eminent. And when we have surrounded our ideal happy man with all imaginable pleasures,—the text concludes the vision—with the damnation of the man's soul; and then bids us balance his gains with his losses. We see in a moment the immeasurable disparity. His acquisitions, however extensive and accumulated, being but of momentary possession, his loss being total and eternal, there appears no proportion or comparison between them. And, this main point being decided, another result necessarily follows:—if the most complete and glorious scene of worldly good that an ambitious and voluptuous mind can imagine, is thus lighter than the dust in the balance, what then are ordinary circumstances of real life, when weighed against the loss of the soul? Less than nothing,—lighter than vanity. This interrogative text appears abundantly more simple, familiar, and convincing, than if the truths it would enforce were formally stated. It presents them to the imagination, embodied, exemplified, and alive, in the person of an individual—a man. Let us follow the text in method, as well as in doctrine: let our subject of this sermon be an individual.

That we may more fully apprehend and feel the doctrine of this passage, let us consider

I. The whole case supposed:—then

II. The questions proposed upon the case;—

1. We are to view at large the supposed case—a man gaining the whole world.

The spirited reasoning of the passage is, as we have already shewn, constructed on this principle:—the cause of religion is so strong and superior, that we may make great concessions to the admirers of a worldly life; we may allow them to assume an extreme case of worldly happiness, far beyond what is probable or possible, and to the extent of what is conceivable;—yet after all, Religion, by

means of its power over futurity, will retain an undeniable and vast superiority.

We intend to state this case in the most favourable manner ; and, as imaginary blessings cost nothing, we may bestow them freely.

That this individual who is to gain the world may enter it with all possible advantages, let him be the heir of a long line of kings, in a country rich and peaceful, eminent for arts and arms, strong in resources and alliances, and terrible to his enemies. Let the hours and years of his childhood be so judiciously superintended, as to allow him all the gratifications which can be consistent with the regulation of the temper, and the formation of habits of obedience. Let the cheerfulness of his disposition qualify him for the full enjoyment of every childish pleasure. Let the vigour of his mind be such as to render his progress in learning easy and rapid. Let his whole education be so happily conducted, as to secure all princely advantages, without the besetting vices of expectant royalty.

As he approaches a manly age, let the gradual unfoldings of his character and accomplishments be such as to procure him a real popularity. Let his person and mind exhibit a rare combination of grace, dignity, and energy. Allow him also a sufficient degree of youthful sensibility to enjoy the world, common to such as know that an empire is their inheritance, and so much judgment and firmness as to resist the allurements of viscous pleasure. This brief sketch of his youth includes a portion of excellence and enjoyment which is barely possible, and has perhaps never been realized.

That his progress to happiness and to eminence may not be retarded, by any interval of listless languor and restrained ambition, let him succeed to his inheritance of empire, as soon as his faculties are ripened to vigour, as soon as adequate accurate knowledge of affairs qualifies

him for the exercise of decision, as soon as in the school of prompt and skilful obedience, he has learned to command. On receiving the sceptre of his forefathers, let him find at his disposal a full treasury,—able and faithful ministers,—a brave and well-disciplined army,—allies serviceable, but not formidable,—and a loyal, numerous, and prosperous people.

That he may proceed by easy and quick steps to the summit of grandeur, let the course of events, speedily after his accession, involve him in a just and necessary war. In the management of it, suppose him to manifest all the great qualities of a hero. Let his military enterprises be conceived with the sublime daring of genius, matured and combined with prudence, pursued with indefatigable energy, executed with rapidity and success. Let him be supposed to gain every town to which he lays siege, to have the advantage in every engagement, and to gain an increase of territory and revenue as the result of every campaign. Suppose him also to exercise an amiable clemency and moderation, amidst the pride and licence of victorious war; and to be preceded, in every march, by the terror of his power, and the conciliating report of his justice and mercy. Let him pass with little embarrassment, and without sickness or a wound, through the numerous stratagems, hardships and dangers of protracted warfare. We have now proceeded through another stage of his progressive prosperity, and have conferred upon him many combined advantages for which some of the greatest of mankind have sighed in vain.

Passing over a long succession of extraordinary triumphs, let us take an advanced view of his splendid progress, and behold him so consolidating his conquests, by a wise and vigorous system of government, as to make his empire increase as much in compact strength as in extent; and employing his accumulated resources with such energetic

and unerring policy, as to overwhelm every opponent, and, finally attain universal empire. None ever *have* acquired such dominion, none ever *will*; but the supposition, that a man should gain the whole world, seems literally to include as much; and it is sufficient for the purposes of instruction that such a case is conceivable.

Now we have conducted him to this eminence, let us place ourselves in thought at his side, and pause to survey, from this summit of grandeur, the variety and extent of his acquisitions.—We behold below him—a thousand millions of mankind. We see all looking up to him as the fountain of honour. We see all dependent on him, for security of property, and protection of life. We behold all the mines, and the merchandise, and the magnificence of the earth made tributary to his treasury. We behold the armies of all nations reposing in peace under his imperial standard. Having the disposal of the lives of all, as his subjects, he might command as much of their wealth as he had occasion for; and would, in virtue of his power, be the richest of mankind. Unlimited authority and inexhaustible wealth would place all the means and instruments of delight before him. The most perfect productions of nature, and the most exquisite inventions of art, would abound around him in endless variety; preventing his wishes, and soliciting his choice. In short, by the acquisition of supreme power, he would obtain convenient access to the wealth, honours, and pleasures of the world; all that could stimulate or gratify the various appetites of man; all that a worldly and unsanctified mind conceives of happiness.

Can we add any more? Can we enlarge this scheme of happiness? What we have to bestow is perhaps more than equal to all that has been stated. There are few that with such acquisitions and nothing more, would not remain dissatisfied.

We have already supposed him to possess genius and learning. To extend the rich range of his worldly enjoyments, give him the superiority in those envied distinctions. Allow him to excel in cultivated, comprehensive, penetrating intellect, as well as in fortune and power. Endow him with those qualities of the mind and of the heart, without which abundant means of happiness would be supplied in vain; with correct taste to select, strong passions to feel, and delicate sensibility to refined enjoyment. He would thus be capable of the greatest of all human pleasures—those of knowledge and affection.

In order to give him, still more completely, the entire uninterrupted enjoyment of all worldly good, let him have, through life, firm and vigorous health, and an ever-flowing tide of success. Behold him stepping forward, from one prosperous event to another, in easy and regular progression, without loss, repulse, or disappointment. Allow him, along with the grandeur and fire of superior genius, so much calculating good sense, so much moderation and self command, as to check unreasonable wishes, and to proportion his enterprises to his resources. Let even his conquest of the globe be undertaken, not from the spontaneous aspirings and romantic ardour of inexperienced ambition; but from the encouragement and excitement afforded, to a mind as prudent as energetic, by the marvellous and triumphant success of his more limited projects; and by the gradual accumulation (during the execution, and through the accomplishment of those limited projects) of revenues so ample, and armies so numerous and efficient, as to make every nation desire his alliance, and dread his displeasure, and to render the subjugation of the world a rational and feasible speculation. By means of such just views of the possibilities of his actual situation, and such self-denying restraint of his desires and of his genius, he would escape much anxiety

and many mortifications. Conceive of him also as governing his conquered world, with such vigour, mildness, and address, as to promote the happiness, and acquire the love of his innumerable subjects; and thus keep his numerous provinces together in tranquil order, without apprehension on the part of the ruler, or rebellion among the subjects. In these articles, we have made suppositions in his favour, as improbable as that of universal empire;—but—we are speaking of one who gains the whole world.

But, is nothing yet wanting to a complete scheme of worldly happiness? To fill up the circle of enjoyments, we must give him a family, and surround him with a plenitude of dear, domestic comforts. We will not give him the harem of an Eastern Sultan:—that would be distraction and not happiness. No: in the pure society of one amiable woman, let him prove all the refined satisfaction that feminine excellence can bestow: let the partner of his heart and throne be the most perfect of the fair in person and mind. Suppose him to have affectionate and virtuous relatives; sincerely devoted to his person and interest, and prudently zealous for his authority and honour. Let his children be many; all amiable, accomplished, and dutiful. Imagine all this happiness to continue and increase through a long life: and to all the advantages already enumerated, join just so much human virtue or worldly morality, as would keep his conscience unalarmed, and be consistent with the want of piety.

If, in any important article, this scheme of worldly happiness appears defective—if anything can be imagined or recollected that would render this man's satisfaction more full and permanent, let that also be added: give him all conceivable grandeur, tranquillity, and pleasure: everything but true religion. We have thus endeavoured to develop the chief parts of what is comprised in our Lord's general supposition,—that one man should gain the whole world.

II. The questions proposed upon the case; calculate what he has profited; and consider what he shall give in exchange for his soul.

We are to contemplate the same individual as dying in sin, and losing his soul.

All the advantages we have enumerated do not include immortality. These progressive scenes of an eventful history of worldly happiness, which though unattainable, is yet conceivable, like the memorials of the patriarchs, must end with the melancholy statement,—“and he died.”

Let us, however, allow him to retain all his unparalleled acquisitions to the last moment. Let his departure be preceded by no sickness and attended by no pain. Let there be “*no bands in his death: let his strength be firm.*” Let him never be disturbed with the apprehension of death; nor be warned of its approach by any decay of vigour, or loss of appetite, or depression of mind. Let him not have any premonitions. In a moment, without a sigh, or a struggle, let him expire in the midst of magnificence and enjoyment, and as full of animating exultation and hope as one who has long been the highest of mankind can possibly be conceived to be. Behold him thus suddenly departing.

Up to this point, no doubt, all appears very joyous and splendid:—but—what a change this *moment* makes! Where now are those dazzling scenes of successful war and sovereign grandeur, and superhuman power and pleasure, which we have so long been contemplating? They have vanished like a morning dream;—like phantoms of enchantment. The blaze of glory is quenched: it is midnight darkness, without one ray. Where now is the master of the world? He lies senseless and silent—where—it matters not. The pomp of a state funeral may yet await him; but, to him, it is less than vanity—it is emptiness—it is nothing! He enjoys no more than his coffin



does, of that world which he has quitted. The chamber where he lies in state is as dark to *his* eyes as the vault where his dust must slumber till the awakening peal of the last trumpet. Where are his possessions? *They* remain—but not for *him*; the poorest of his surviving slaves may well pity him now. Of all that he required, of all that he enjoyed, of all that he commanded, he retains nothing—nothing but the tormenting, undying remembrance of a lost good, of a lost world.

And this is but a part of his loss. As he lived destitute of true religion, he never enjoyed its temporal blessings. Had he proved these, he would have found more happiness on his knees before God, than on his throne, or at the head of armies:—he would have found godliness with contentment, greater gain than the treasures of the universe:—he would have found victory over his own heart, more gratifying than the conquest of empires: he would have found the witness of the Spirit, with the testimony of a good conscience, sweeter than the joy of worldly popularity:—he would have derived, even from his worldly possessions, a more substantial, and pure enjoyment; for, “blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” These blessings, and many more, religion could have bestowed upon him; but he has missed them all; and now the opportunity of attaining them has for ever passed away. He who has the whole world without godliness, neglects (even in this life) more than he enjoys.

And still we have viewed but a part, and that the smaller part of his loss. He has lost, for ever, the glories of the inheritance of the saints in light: glories as far transcending all the magnificence of *his* world, as the sun excels the faintest, glimmering, planetary star; or as the mild, steady, general light of day excels the gloomy, flickering glare of a torch.

He has lost a throne and dominion among the princi-

palities and powers of heaven. He has lost enjoyments that would have been perfect, eternal, and, probably, for ever increasing. His total loss is beyond the limits of calculation; for all the advantages bestowed upon him in this world, however improbable or impossible, may yet be conceived and described, but the blessings of that heavenly world, for which God in his Divine goodness designed him, are greater than our mightiest conceptions. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered the heart of man to conceive the things God hath prepared for them that love him."

It is further to be considered, that having died in his sins, impenitent, unpardoned, unholy, without piety, he has not only the punishment of loss, but also of positive misery; of the most extreme degree, of the most dreadful kind; unmixed with comfort, unmitigated by hope. The sentence of the damned includes hell-fire; a tremendous penalty which we dare not explain away, and whose literal import no man has authority to deny. But hell-fire is not the sum of their penal sufferings: there is also the worm that dieth not; the self-consuming, everlasting anguish of a bad mind; the unutterable, gloomy, restless despair of a desolate spirit, tormented with unavailing, yet inevitable reflection on the interminable miseries of "the wrath to come." The sum of these things is the loss of the soul: that is, the loss of its eternal happiness, and its condemnation to perpetual misery.

Such an individual as we have contemplated, having such acquisitions, and coming to such an end, would have no common damnation. We have not beheld him stained with any revolting vices, or disgraceful sins; these were not necessary to insure a supremacy of misery in the future world. To enjoy so large a share of the gifts of nature and providence, to have access to the gifts of grace, and yet to live and die altogether ungodly, renders life itself one long

continuous, enormous, aggravated sin. But let us still deal favourably with him. Let us pass by all the aggravations arising from the abuse of so many benefits; and suppose him to have only the most mitigated portion of penal misery. The advantage of a holy life is so immense and so unquestionable, that its advocates may afford to make such a gratuitous concession: but the basis of that opinion or prejudice which prefers this world, is so weak and narrow, that such a concession will still leave it helpless and tottering. The least punishment in that world of torment involves a total destitution of all good, natural and moral; and an intolerable degree of inflicted wretchedness: it excludes all remedy, all hope, even the dreadful, forlorn hope of annihilation. The most awful circumstance that can be connected with misery is eternity. These two combined, in the sentence of wrath to come, form the most tremendous subject within the range of human ideas.

A celebrated French preacher, of the last century, whose ministry was chiefly confined to the simple inhabitants of country villages, being, on some occasion, appointed to preach in one of the churches of Paris, was attended by a large congregation, composed chiefly of men of rank, wealth and learning, who had been attracted by the fame of his eloquence. Unintimidated by the number and splendour of his new auditors, and judging the majority of them to be men of the world, he declared his intention to deal faithfully with them as his fellow-sinners, and to address them on the necessity of salvation, the certainty of death, the uncertainty of its hour so terrible to sinners, final impenitence, the last judgment, hell, and eternity. When, towards the close of the sermon, he was exciting his vigorous mind to its greatest effort, in order to give them some notion, however inadequate, of the affecting character of that eternity which their sins were preparing for them, he said, among other things, "Do you know what eternity

is? It is a clock, the pendulum of which incessantly says, *Always—Ever—Always—Ever—Always—Ever!* During these vibrations a damned soul cries out, ‘What o’clock is it?’ and the same voice answers him, ‘*Eternity!*’”\* Yes, should some miserable spirit, ten thousand years after the day of judgment enquire, *What is the time?* the proper reply will be, *It is eternity.* The sufferings of such a soul will sometime amount to a greater sum of misery than has been endured by all generations of men from the fall to this day. History is full of plagues, crimes, and calamities occasioned by crimes; but all that has been inflicted on mankind, in all ages and countries, by storms and earthquakes, by pestilence and famine, by fire and sword, by public oppression and domestic cruelty, by guilty passions and by the terrors of remorse, being endured by a limited number of finite beings in a measured duration, is short of infinitude. Any degree of pain, therefore, which is protracted and perpetuated to eternity, must, in that abyss of futurity, accumulate to a greater sum of wretchedness, than all the miseries of this world multiplied by the greatest number for which language has found a name.

Having now seen this man gaining the whole world, and losing his soul, let us *thirdly* consider the questions, *what he has profited, and what he shall give in exchange for his soul.*

Not many words need be wasted in ascertaining to which part of his account the balance belongs; though no terms in human language can adequately express the extent and horror of his ruin.

The whole account now stands on the losing side. Whatever once stood on the page of profit, is transferred to that of loss. He has lost that world which he had, and those comforts of religion which he might have had, that

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\* See *Principles of Eloquence*, by M. Maury

heavenly inheritance which religion would have secured. Such are his losses that he has now less than nothing : he is in debt to an incalculable sum : he has nothing wherewith to pay : the uttermost farthing is demanded.

Such being the utter helplessness of his condition, how can we proceed with the remaining part of his case ? how can we say what he shall give in exchange for his soul ? If the least portion of his former possessions would redeem him, he has it not. He can make no offers ; he can enter into no terms ; he can undertake no conditions. If he had anything in possession or reversion, he could not offer it ; it would be swallowed up by the immensity of his debts.

In order then to proceed with this important enquiry, we must again have recourse to supposition. It is already ascertained that he cannot give anything in exchange for his soul : and nothing he can be supposed to have or acquire would be sufficient for its precious ransom : but, that we may judge what he *would* give, and that we may see how (according to the known principles and motives of human conduct) he will act, if he has a fair opportunity of shewing the change of his sentiments, let a messenger from the throne of God descend to visit him in the fiery depths of the bottomless abyss : let his trial be made as soon as he has been long enough in that world of pain for its unutterable instruction to have passed through his soul, for his spirit to know and feel the tremendous intensity of its punishment, and to be duly impressed with the certainty of its unrelaxing rigour and perpetual continuance. Let the ethereal messenger now tell him, "Thou art at liberty to quit, for a season, this mansion of pain : thou mayest return to the throne of the universe : that sceptre which death dashed from thy hand, shall, with all its attendant prerogatives and power, be restored to thy grasp : thy late subjects shall hail thy resumption of life and empire with unanimous acclamations : thy children shall again bless

thine eyes, the wife of thy youth shall again adorn thy court, and lighten the cares of thy heart: thou shalt live and reign, in health and tranquillity, and honour, for a thousand years: but know, that the voice of the gospel shall never more be addressed to *thee*: the precious promises of the gracious covenant thou hast neglected are sealed up for ever: thy barren soul shall never be watered nor refreshed with the dew of heaven's grace: the Mediator who pleaded for thee during the years of thy probation will intercede no more: the Holy Spirit will never renew thee to repentance, nor offer thee salvation: the world is thine again for a thousand years, but, at the end of that period thou shalt return hither—this horrible pit shall thenceforward be thy prison for ever and ever."

*Now* he has something in his hand. He is at once placed in a new and singular situation, which is sufficient to develop instantaneously all the inmost depths of his miserable spirit. At the first sounds of this message, "Thou art at liberty," how would the stranger, Hope, lighten in his eye! In the first prospect of deliverance he would even forget his present torments. As he heard further of his restored kingdom, his children, his queen, and the long lease of those interesting possessions, departed joys would return with an exquisite thrill to his desolate bosom: his new hope would mount up to ecstasy, and the transport in his countenance would astonish his companions in misery, the ghosts of hell. But, when the angel, proceeding to complete his strange errand, should say, "the voice of the gospel shall never more be addressed to *thee*: how would his countenance fall! And while the sentence of his condemnation was further and more circumstantially confirmed, till he heard that, at last, *the horrible pit should be his prison for ever and ever*, how would his ghastly features resume the rigid aspect of despair! When the heavenly voice ceased in his ear—

would he be at a loss for a reply? would he be in haste to return to earth and royalty? would he pause, and muse, and ask questions? would he request time for deliberation? nay, rather, would not despair, the sense of a great crisis make him eloquent? would he not cry in an agony of prayer, "Perish millions of worlds, but give me Christ! I have tasted of damnation, I have been crushed under the wrath of the Almighty! O give me one day of renewed probation, rather than *ten* thousand years of empire! O let trial be made, once more, whether I will neglect my Saviour, and despise the riches of his grace! O Christ hear me, and save me! Deliver me for ever from this tormenting flame!"

Does your heart, O reader, agree to his new sentiments, and feel the propriety of his prayer? Only act according to those sentiments, and seek your salvation with the earnestness of that prayer, and without having this man's singular course, or his miserable end, you may have the full benefit of his whole experience. Putting your soul in his soul's stead would you not say—"Perish millions of worlds, but give me Christ!" Then, I ask, what *are* you? how are you *living*? and how do you *intend* to live?

Are you a man of the world? What then is your world worth, and what can you make of it? Put it in the balances—take it at its largest sum, in your most prosperous and joyous years—heap it with your most valued connexions—add also your most doubtful and disputable possessions, as if they were insured—pour in your most extravagant hopes as a makeweight—now, try to lift the balance:—there is the weight of eternal ruin in the other scale, and *your* world vaults aloft in the air, and is lighter than vanity.

You know that you can never gain the whole world; it is an impossible case, assumed for the purpose of illustration. When you have made the most of your time, talents,

friends, opportunities, and all other means, in improving your state as a man of the world, you will come at last to Solomon's discovery—"That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered." Man cannot find happiness where God has not placed it. You will find that man in his best earthly state is altogether vanity, and that the world will obstinately continue to be a scene of uncertainty, vicissitude, disappointment and affliction.

Your heart and conscience have assented to the conclusion that ten thousand years' possession of universal empire would be wisely and cheaply sacrificed for the sake of deliverance from everlasting punishment; and will you for the sake of this day's unquiet, and unsafe, and unholy enjoyment of *your little* world, put your eternal salvation to hazard till that to-morrow which you may never see? A little more perseverance in sin may perhaps consign you to more misery than we have contemplated; and cause you to know, by bitter experience of the fact, that nothing can then be given *in exchange for the soul*.

Do you say, "I dare not any longer persevere as a sinner. Is there any thing I can now give in exchange for my soul?" All you have must be surrendered as the Lord's: yet all you have would be like the small dust of the balance towards the redemption of your soul which is precious. But in this hopeless extremity, God says, *Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom*. The ransom is Jesus Christ; who has purchased us with his own blood: and He says, *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out: and Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*.

God has answered the question, *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* by putting the precious ransom into your hand. Hence St. Paul, referring to a passage in Deuteronomy, says, *Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend*



*into heaven ? (that is to bring Christ down from above :) or, Who shall descend into the deep ? (that is to bring up Christ again from the dead. (But what saith it ? namely the righteousness which is of faith.) The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart : that is, the word of faith, which we preach ; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.—For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth in Him shall not be ashamed.*

What do you resolve to do ? The world is before you, not to enjoy as you please, but probably to endure as you can. Christ is before you, to be received or rejected. Eternity is before you, for you to choose your portion. Life is given you by a moment at once, and will soon terminate. Now is the seed-time of eternity :—therefore sow as you would hereafter reap : and, what you do, do it quickly, for *the Lord is at hand.*

Do you say, “Do not be in such pressing haste with us. We do indeed love the world, and hope to enjoy it sometime longer ; but,—we have no inclination to lose our souls ; and, though not just now, we will certainly, sometime soon, begin to think about our salvation ?” Who prompts you to make this reply to the expostulations of divine mercy ? It is some inveterate enemy of your peace, some agent of the prince of darkness, some evil spirit at your right hand, who whispers, “A little more slumber, a little more pleasure, a little longer delay.” Will you listen to his flattery, will you gratify his malice ? And, who are *you* who say, “We will certainly, sometime soon, begin to think of our salvation ?” Children of the dust !—The wood is probably felled, and laid up in store, of which your coffins will be made ; and the stone ready hewn that will tell the passenger how young you died.

Are you sure of your sincerity when you say, “I will

*repent* at such a time—next year for instance? How often have you promised before?

Think you God ought to be pacified with fair words and promises? What then is the meaning of these promises, that are to make truce with him? Their meaning belongs to the Devil, their phrase only to your Saviour. The true sense of such promises is, “God—I will not serve thee at present. Neither thy mercy nor thy terrors shall prevail with me to submit till such a time!” Will you deceive yourselves with such promises? Will you thus provoke God? Rather say, this moment, “Lord what wouldest thou have me to do?” and plead with him, in fervent, importunate prayer, *by the ransom he has found for your soul.*

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## LOT.

“Escape for thy life : look not behind thee ; neither stay thou in all the plain ; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.”—GENESIS xix. 17.

THESE earnest words were addressed to Lot, with his wife and daughter, immediately after they had been led out of the gates of Sodom ; and a short time before the rain of fire came down upon the cities of the plain. The words of this brief warning to the departing family, bring vividly before us their strange and awful situation. Destruction itself was waiting their departure. Dangers and evils, unspeakably great and terrible, hung behind them, ready to fall ; a safe refuge was pointed out ; and with a merciful authority, their lingering steps were quickened by these words of command to the head of the family. “Escape for thy life : look not behind thee ; neither stay thou in all the plain ; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.”

With many serious readers of the Scriptures—Lot departing from Sodom, naturally leads their thoughts to the case of a penitent sinner renouncing the corruptions and vanities of the world, separating himself from its abominations, and seeking a refuge from the wrath with which eternal justice threatens the impenitent and unbelieving.

It may be useful to apply to the case of penitents and believers in this evil world, the suitable counsel and warning which are suggested by this charge to Lot and his family. The exhortation in the text is as fitting to the general circumstances of a few god-fearing persons, any where, in any times, among ungodly neighbours, as it was nearly 4,000 years ago to the Hebrew patriarch. The guilt

and wrath, to which the text alludes, belong as much to its meaning as the words do. It is proposed

I. So far to consider the *case* of the doomed region and people, from which Lot was commanded away, as may prepare us—

II. To ponder and apply the *charge* which was given to Lot at the gate of Sodom.

I. So far to consider the case, etc.

The history of Sodom, as far as it is known, begins and ends with Lot. The place is first mentioned in stating the fact and the occasion of his going thither : and the day of his departure was the last day of Sodom.

1. The occasion of Lot's going to Sodom—Strife between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot. Genesis xiii.

The cattle of the two prosperous families were too numerous for the grass and water of the country.

Abraham's conduct—wise, forbearing, generous,—a pattern to all who would preserve peace or restore it. Peace is not to be had by claiming the extreme of personal rights.

The country to be divided was Canaan in general.—The vale of Siddim was a part of it.

The character of the country—The Plain of Jordan—well watered everywhere, as the garden of the Lord—as the land of Egypt.

The character of the people. Wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly “A hideous assemblage of depraved beings, such as might have been vomited forth from the bottomless pit, to descend again in an earthquake and tempest of fire.”

2. Lot's choice.—Lot, one of the weakest of good men,—chose Sodom. He should have referred the case back to his generous uncle, and, at least, have asked his counsel. But he coveted the rich, well-watered pastures, and too eagerly grasped the opportunity

3. Lot's captivity. He had early proof how dear rich pastures might be amongst a wicked people. After he had been a few years at Sodom, he was taken captive by the king of Elam and his confederates, and nobly rescued by Abraham; who acted with equal kindness, judgment and energy, in the attack and the pursuit; and with a magnanimous prudence on his return: declining any recompenses from the wicked.

4. Lot's continuance in Sodom. After such an escape, Lot still dragged on about fifteen years longer in that wicked country: exposing his family to bad examples and connexions, and himself to daily vexations.

The example and influence of one weak, good man and his indifferent family, had little or no effect on the neighbours of Lot. His daily life was a testimony against them; but his residence in Sodom costs all parties dear.

5. When Lot had been about twenty years in Sodom, the iniquity of the people was *almost full*; and whatever was wanting in the measure of their iniquities, they were making haste to fill up. Twenty years before they "were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly;" but after being delivered by *one* righteous man, and witnessing the daily life of another, they did not repent; but grew worse and worse.

6. But the first tokens of Divine interference with their daring impiety, were of a very quiet description—no alarming portents, no prodigies,—no voices nor thunders from above or below.

A visit to Abraham, from God in the form of a man. Three strangers—travellers, as they seemed, drew near, as Abraham sat in the door of his tent, in the heat of the day. Looking up, he suddenly perceived their presence,—not having observed their distant approach. He offered and they accepted hospitality.

It soon appeared that *they* knew more of *him* than he did of them. One of the strangers said—"Where is Sarah thy wife?" etc.

After refreshment and conversation they continued their journey in the direction of Sodom—Abraham courteously setting them forward on their way. The one who had spoken to Sarah, now condescendingly told Abraham the substance of their errand to Sodom. Abraham detained that one,—whom he now recognised as the Lord; while the other two went on towards Sodom.

Abraham interceded—*not* for Lot: as to him he confided, without enquiry or stipulation, in the righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness,—but for Sodom,—assuming fifty, forty-five, thirty, twenty, ten righteous might be found there; and returned to his place; satisfied that the judge of all the earth would do right. The Spirit "*that maketh intercession,*" did not lead him to plead for a less number than ten.

It was *afternoon* when Abraham left the presence of the Lord,—the sun was warm upon Sodom—the Jordan ran by—all the scenery serene and beautiful—and the inhabitants secure and audacious as they were wont to be.

Little did they think what a conversation they had been the subjects of. Had they known, they would perhaps have disdained the pleader and his pleading. Little did they imagine what had been agreed between their neighbour Abraham and the most high God, "the possessor of heaven and earth"—that they two had parted with this clear understanding between them—that the preservation or destruction of Sodom should depend on—whether ten persons like Lot could be found there. Had ten such been there—the city, and the region, and the wicked thousands would have been spared for their sakes. And if there *had* been ten, and if Sodom had consequently been spared—while the guilty multitude would have been indebted to

*them* for their lives, their country, and their all—how would they have requited them? They would not have believed that the few good men were so precious, and so powerful, as to be their preservers. They would not have believed their own actual danger, or their escape through such influences. They would have owed their lives and their all to the *ten*; but they would have denied the debt. The *ten* would have been as the *one* was—barely tolerated, hardly endured,—wronged, and scorned, and threatened;—perhaps eventually driven away or martyred.

But there was but *one* instead of *ten*. The doom of the wicked people was settled, and its execution impending, for want of a few like Lot, to stay or avert it, and they knew it not.

The same evening, the earth and the heavens being still quiet, *two men*, in appearance, the same two who went on while the Lord talked with Abraham, came to Sodom. The noon had been hot, when Abraham sat in the door of his tent, the evening was probably bright and calm. The last sunset of the place and of the people was shining on the dwellings, the trees, the green fields, and the plenteous waters of that delightful plain: Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom, probably on purpose to prevent any respectable travellers from falling into the hands of such foul and vile barbarians as he knew the people to be. He saw the strangers approach, respectfully invited them, pressed his invitation, overcame their apparent reluctance, and brought them into his dwelling. When the seeming travellers, but disguised angels, entered, neither Lot, nor any in Sodom, knew *what* they were, or *whence* they came, or *why* they came. Hitherto, all was quiet, but the treasured wrath was about to be poured forth.

7. An outrage of this horde of criminals, hastened the proceedings of lingering justice. The coming of the strangers had not been unseen, nor unnoticed, by the

brutally depraved inhabitants. Old and young from every quarter, before the usual hour of retiring for rest, compassed the house round about, avowing purposes of the vilest wickedness.

In the ordinary practice of righteousness, Lot entertained angels unawares; his neighbours, in their usual course of wickedness, unawares encountered and provoked these mighty celestial spirits.

When sinners are almost ripe for destruction, they are generally so hardened and infatuated, that if but one drop more be wanting to make the waters of bitterness overflow, they are not afraid, but eager, to add that one drop more. There is something awfully characteristic about the last provocation, that precedes divine vengeance and brings it down; that bursts through into eternity, with all the sins of the whole life following after, to the blackness, and darkness, and tempest of the horrible pit.

8. When his bad neighbours pressed upon him, Lot was intimidated and confused. There was nothing in him of the sagacious intrepidity which Abraham had exerted for his rescue. He made a proposal which he had no right to make—to give up to them his two daughters. He was disposed by *true* honour to protect his guests to the uttermost, and by *false* honour to set the ties of hospitality above those of paternal duty. Of two sins we must choose *neither*, but leave such extremities to God.

Lot's strange proposal was rejected with scorn: but the difficulty was to be disposed of in another manner. The unknown guests of Lot pulled him in to them, within the door; and smote the vile crowd with blindness: yet the blinded and bewildered mob, old and young, wearied themselves to find the door. The *young* being with the *old*, on such an occasion, shews the fearful efficacy of wicked training.

9. Again there was safety and quiet within Lot's dwell-



ing, but not repose. The guests who had exerted such mysterious power, had entered Lot's house, not to enjoy the proffered rest, but to execute a divine sentence.

They commanded their astonished host to go to any members of his family, who might be in the city, and to bring them out, with all that he had in the place. They gave him the reason of their command, that God had sent them to destroy that whole fruitful region, as the event shews; to make the country a monument of wrath to the end of time; to cause the very soil, that had been the scene of such pollutions, to disappear from under the heavens.

10. Lot went out under the cover of night. But to his sons-in-law—what a misery to have sons-in-law in Sodom—he seemed as one who either jested or raved. He doubtless lingered with *them*, as he lingered afterwards at home; pleading with them, and with his daughters; but he returned, sad and alone, as morning appeared, to the waiting angels.

11. He lingered after his return, and was mercifully hastened. The two angels, with gentle constraint, led the four persons; here was visible Providence. And when they had brought them to the outside of Sodom, one of the angels said, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee; neither stay thou in all the plain, escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

Lot, rather presumptuously, pleaded for Zoar; as being *little*, and *nearer* than the mountain. The angel, making a difference between him and Abraham, granted his request, without discussion, as one in haste; and repeated the peremptory injunction to be gone.

12. It was now early twilight. The last moments of the inhabitants of four populous cities, were measuring out by the steps of the four fugitives across the plain. The angels remained to see how a guilty and infatuated race

began their last morning, and to wait the moment of Lot's entrance into Zoar.

13. As Lot, with trembling steps, held on his way to Zoar, how would thought chase thought in his hurried and bewildered mind. A few hours before it was evening; he was sitting in the gate of Sodom; two seeming travellers became his guests; an outrage was threatened, and then—they were angels. He was sent by them to warn his relatives. His sons-in-law were incredulous and heedless; his daughters remained with their husbands; he was commanded away: destruction was waiting for him to get out of its range. He dared not look back. He must not take one hurried glance at the dwelling he had occupied about twenty years, at the city where his married daughters were left, at the scenes he must never behold again.

14. Lot did not look back; he persevered to the gates of Zoar. There he found his wife missing. Then probably he saw her a stiffened monument on the road from Sodom. The relatives of good men should take care to go all the way with them to heaven. Lot's wife may have been almost safe when she looked back and perished.

15. The angels waited for Lot's arrival: that was their signal. The sun was just rising when Lot entered into Zoar. "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground."

There was no voice or sentiment of penitence in Sodom, and justice had its awful course, in the tempest of fire. How did the daring wretches meet it? There was only time for astonishment, despair and death.

16. Abraham, from a distance, rising early, *saw the smoke* of the country; and thus learnt that there were *not ten righteous found* in Sodom. What comprehensive intelli-

gence in that glance! Thus "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him."

17. After all there are worse sinners than the men of Sodom. If we neglect the Gospel, and its great salvation it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment.

Returning now to the text selected from this awful history, let us

II. Ponder and apply the charge given to Lot at the gate of Sodom.

We may profitably consider—the *danger* implied, the *refuge* pointed out, the *immediate escape* enjoined.

1. The *danger*—great, pressing, extensive, dreadful. Great—*Life* at stake—Escape for thy *life*. More than life endangered.

Pressing—close behind—requiring immediate flight, as from a pursuing wild beast—no time to look back.

Extensive—all the plain involved—not only drunkards, thieves, murderers, are threatened, but decent, respectable sinners—all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men:—not slight removes from the tents of wickedness; but salvation from all sin is necessary.

Dreadful and fatal—Lest thou be *consumed*.

In the event of our neglecting to escape—*destruction*; intolerable, boundless, endless. To sit *still* is sufficient to make our ruin sure.

2. The *Refuge* pointed out—is *near*, *accessible*, *sufficient*, *unavailable*.

Near. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, 'Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.'"

Lot thought the mountain too distant. Perhaps fear had weakened both his body and his mind.

Accessible—as Zoar, and more so. His salvation is nigh them that fear him. “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Sufficient. “He shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.”

Unassailable—as the last quotation shews—on *high*—above the range of the enemy’s artillery—munitions of rocks, not to be undermined or taken by storm. Bread given—waters sure—“My God shall supply all your need.”

3. The immediate *escape* enjoined.

Quit Sodom. Renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh. Lot had to quit or perish.

*He* might have been as safe among his wicked neighbours, as *we* can be, in taking our portion with men of the world.

*Quit all.* Count all worthy to be lost for Christ, that in any way hinders from being *safe* with him. Lot had to leave goods and connexions. It is not likely that he had time to collect and take away all that belonged to him.

Make haste. Lot had to make more haste than he was inclined to. Those who *escape for their* lives, cannot stay for trifles, nor bargain for conveniences and indulgences.

Never look back. Lot did *not*. His wife *did*. Our Lord bids us *remember her*.

Lot did wrong in going to Sodom, in remaining there after his rescue, in begging for Zoar, (he should have relied implicitly on the word that directed him to the mountain), in not watching sufficiently afterwards.

Let us never seek rich pastures, or any equivalent, at the price of dwelling *as* in Sodom—let us never risk our soul for things that perish in the using.

Let us follow divine directions with implicit confidence and simple submission.

Let us cheerfully and completely abandon whatever endangers our salvation.

Let us abide in Christ, watching unto prayer.

God hates sin as much as when Sodom was burning.

He is as just as when Abraham said—"Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

He is as merciful to the humble and sincere as when he hastened and delivered, bewildered and trembling Lot.

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## JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN.

“Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by Him : and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud : and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I [am] Joseph ; doth my father yet live ? And his brethren could not answer him ; for they were troubled at his presence.”—GENESIS xlv. 1-3.

THE scripture history of Joseph is so full of simple beauty ; so richly replete with the most natural, moving and wonderful scenes and events ; and has given so much pure delight to all attentive readers of the Bible ; that it is scarcely possible to select any part of it for the purposes of instruction, without some risk of disappointing expectation. Those who have read the ancient narrative in Genesis with transport, are not unlikely to feel languor or indifference in viewing the same subject through the medium of a sermon.

But many persons, either through the difficulties and anxieties of their temporal condition, or for want of inclination, never exert the power, much less acquire the habit, of reading with active and sustained attention. Even when they receive high pleasure from the perusal of a pathetic and surprising history, their faculties are still in a passive state :—acted upon and excited by the more obvious, touching, or remarkable parts of the animated picture spread out before their mind’s eye ;—but merely receiving and enjoying what is most plainly and prominently set before them ; and not attempting that close observation of the various parts in succession, without which many minute and implied circumstances will be unmasked or slightly noticed, and the whole dimly apprehended and vaguely remembered.

To such readers, many things which they have formerly

read with haste and indifference, and which in *their* method of reading appeared dull and uninteresting, stand forth in a new and striking manner when distinctly presented to their apprehension. For the sake of such readers, persons of superior intelligence will tolerate an occasional review of subjects whose novelty *they* have exhausted; and for the same reason they will also excuse a fulness of statement which for *their* instruction would be superfluous. Some perhaps who, when the text is first set before them, are ready to think, "Why, we know all about Joseph and his brethren," may be made to perceive that various small portions of the subject had escaped their notice, and persons who are familiar with all the parts of the story, may find valuable instruction lying near the surface, which they had not before stooped to discover.

To those at least, who are not patient in meditating on the small incidents and implied parts, on which a right notion of greater things often depends, some assistance may be useful in investigating this remarkable period in the life of Joseph.

The texts records the affecting termination of the politic mystery of Joseph's behaviour to his brethren. It presupposes the previous concealment, and describes the sudden discovery of his relation to the ten Patriarchs. In order to a clear view of this subject, it may be expedient to consider

- I. The mystery of Joseph's behaviour to his brethren;
- II. The termination of that mystery;
- III. The instruction herein furnished by example or suggestion.

We are *first* to consider the mystery of Joseph's behaviour to his brethren.

The following expressions in the text, "*There Joseph could not refrain himself,*" and "*there stood no man with him while Joseph made himself known to his brethren,*"—are

those which *presuppose* a previous concealment. At the time here spoken of, the perplexity of the brethren was extreme;—to understand the past,—to unravel the present,—and to provide for the future they found alike impracticable.

The famine had continued scarcely two years when the ten brethren were first introduced to Joseph, as foreigners, who desired permission to purchase corn from the public stores of Egypt; yet some circumstances render it likely *that the wealth which Jacob possessed* at the time of his meeting Esau, *had been greatly diminished*; partly by the regular maintenance of twelve families, and partly by the extraordinary expense of purchasing corn at a famine price for so many households in time of famine. Jacob returning from Laban, said to Esau, by his messengers, “I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and men-servants and women-servants.” If he had still possessed numerous men-servants, some of *them* would probably have been sent into Egypt, with a smaller number of the brethren. And if he still had camels, as when he gave at least sixty to Esau, they would have been more suitable than asses for the journey to Egypt, and for the conveyance of corn.

It seems probable that the gradual approach and actual presence of poverty and distress, had wrought with time and reflection, to humble and soften the ten brethren. *Their first appearance* before Joseph was that of *men taught and tamed by adversity*. They had felt that alarming precariousness of their means of living, which was so naturally expressed by their father, when he said, “*Why do ye look one upon another? Behold I have heard that there is corn in Egypt; get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live and not die.*” When brought into the presence of Joseph, “*they bowed down themselves before him, with their faces to the earth.*” They knew not the governor before whom they prostrated themselves; but *he* was in



power, and *they* were in need : and though they came to *buy* corn and not to *beg* it, they felt that the permission to buy was a great favour ; and were therefore disposed to shew all respect and humility before one who had power to deny that favour.

From that time commenced that mysterious behaviour of Joseph towards them, which kept them in anxiety and perplexity till the moment when he made himself known.

The *power* to deal thus with them arose, chiefly, from the circumstance that "Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him : " he had prudent *motives* for remaining unknown, he had honest and important *ends* to attain : he suited his *means* to the character of the men and to the ends he sought : and he watched the working of his machinery with *penetrating discernment* and with strong fraternal emotions.

1. It was just now remarked that *the power to render his intercourse with them mysterious and perplexing, arose chiefly from his knowing his brethren while they knew not him.* He appears to have been brought to Egypt in his eighteenth year. After that event, twenty-one years at the least had passed, in which there was no communication between Joseph and the rest of the family. If the art of writing was not then in use, the difficulty of such intercourse would be very great. He who was but a boy when they sold him, was become a mature man, of the age of thirty-eight years. He had endured thirteen years of slavery, part of them being spent in prison. He had enjoyed eight years of power and command over a rich and civilized nation. Twenty-one years of city-life, combined with his long formed habits of self-restraint and discreet authority, would sufficiently account for and naturally tend to effect a greater change in Joseph's countenance and demeanour, than would be produced, within the same time, in the personal appearance of his brethren. The first four

elder of the ten brethren were *men* when Joseph had last seen them; and having continued in the same condition, occupation, and manner of life, would be much less changed than himself. He had also the advantage of seeing the *ten together*; of observing their family likeness to his Father; and to the three mothers, who bore them; of seeing in each one the same personal peculiarities of manner that might formerly distinguish him; and of hearing their well-remembered voices speak the family dialect. But not only was he disguised to their view by great changes in his appearance; but their natural supposition that he must have sunk into the grave under the sore hardships of slavery, precluded all anticipation of meeting with him in any station. He heard them speak of himself as dead. Nothing was further from their thoughts than their finding him in robes of dignity, and with a chain of gold about his neck, as the governor of Egypt. His precaution in using the dialect he had learned in Egypt and speaking to them through an interpreter; as well as the assumed harshness of his tone and manner, still further lessened the chances of their being reminded of the mild youth of seventeen. The voice of Joseph was probably more changed than the voices of the elder brethren; and they had never before heard him mentioned by his Egyptian name, or by his title of office; and that his Hebrew name was not pronounced in their hearing.

Perceiving that he was unknown, Joseph wisely determined to remain so, and to avail himself of all opportunity of observation, till it should become just and prudent to discover himself; intending in the mean time to treat his brethren in such a manner as would facilitate the judicious and benevolent purposes he had formed concerning them.

2. A brief survey of Joseph's situation will show that he had prudent motives for continuing sometime undiscovered.

The last time *he* had seen these ten brethren, and heard their voices,—twenty-one years before they bowed down to him in Egypt as distressed and suppliant strangers,—was when, actuated by wicked passions, some were pale and trembling with rage, some brutally exulting, some coldly stern, and all except Reuben, implacable :—it was when “*they saw the anguish of his soul when he besought them, and they would not hear.*”—it was when, after threatening his life with naked weapons, they doomed him to die of hunger in a deep pit, and at last transferred their brother as merchandise to the Midianites,—coolly receiving the sordid silver, while they glutted their hatred with the long prospect of his servile hardships, and his final separation from paternal indulgence, and with the anticipation that heart-breaking bondage would prove a mortal hindrance to the fulfilment of his dreams. His last recollections of their persons were connected with a scene of terror and agony, and with the beginning of thirteen years of slavery. He had endured a long series of severe calamities as the fruit of their envious and unscrupulous enmity. He had no immediate means of knowing their present mind. But well might he ask himself if his *dreams* provoked their deadly hatred, how would they bear the *fulfilment*?

He had reason to know that some of them were men of great capacity and formidable energy. He could hardly be ignorant of the ready talents of Judah : and, by a terrible instance, Simeon and Levi had shewn themselves capable of subtle contrivance and daring execution. Common prudence therefore required that he should retain his advantage in being *unknown*, till he could ascertain with what degree of safety he might be *made known*. It would have been rash to have trusted such men with the secret of his name, and his relation to themselves, that he was Joseph their brother, while, for aught he knew, they might retain the remorseless hatred which he had found so unrelenting at the field of Dothan.

3. In addition to motives of precaution he had motives of judicious benevolence. He had wise, kind, and important ends in view; and it was as necessary for the attainment of these, as for his own safety, that he should remain some time unknown. It was reasonable and natural that he should desire to know, not only what effect the discovery of himself would be likely to have on their feelings towards him, but what general change time had made in their principles and dispositions,—whether they were as envious and malignant as formerly,—how they would behave to each other in trouble,—and especially how they felt towards his father and Benjamin, and what steps might be needful on their behalf, in case he found the ten brethren undutiful and unkind towards them. Previous to experiment, it was probable that in twenty-one years his brethren had become either *better* or *worse*; either more selfish and unfeeling, or more mild and generous. It deeply concerned him to know which of these changes time had made. Had he prematurely discovered himself, he would have finally lost the opportunity of seeing their real character. He could not fail to be aware that as soon as *he* put *off* disguise, *they* would put it *on*,—that shame and fear, and hope and ambition, would dispose them to put on, before an injured brother, discovered in so high a station, artful appearances, which they had no motive to assume before the unknown minister of Pharaoh.

4. Joseph suited his means to the former character of the men, and to the ends he sought. The stern authority and suspicious harshness he assumed in his first interview, and the policy of employing an interpreter, were an effectual mask to keep himself concealed. When he said, “*Ye spies,—to see the nakedness of the land are ye come,*”—there was nothing to remind them of the gentle, beardless youth, who, twenty-one years before had besought them in *the anguish of his soul*.—By confining them in prison for three

days, he inflicted a very light chastisement for their offences against himself. He tried the effect of three days bondage, on those who had caused him thirteen years of slavery, and more than two years of imprisonment. Of these free and bold spirits it might have been said, as of the wild ass described in Job,—“*He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver, the range of the mountains in his pasture.*” But they were now made to taste a little of the bitterness of lost liberty; a little of the distress of having life and freedom in suspense, subject to the pleasure of one whose power they could not resist. They were supplied with a painful stimulus to reflection on their own injustice and cruelty. Joseph knew by experience *the secrets of the prison house*, and the tendency of confinement to promote reflection. To imprison them was his first expedient, resolved upon during their first interview;—it was a proceeding which he could alter at pleasure; and it allowed him time to deliberate with himself concerning the use to be made of the opportunity which Providence had placed in his hands, and the plans to be pursued in his further dealings with them.

When he ordered them to prison, he proposed that one of them should be sent to fetch Benjamin; and that the rest should be kept in prison till his arrival. To this it appears they made no reply; they neither accepted nor rejected it. They were doubtless too much surprised and perplexed to concert any answer; they did not wish to provoke this powerful stranger by a direct refusal; and all of them were sensible of the difficulty of inducing their father to let Benjamin join them in such perilous uncertainty.

On the third day he intimated to them by the interpreter, that he had too much of the fear of God to act unjustly towards them; and offered a milder proposal,—that one of them should remain in prison as a hostage,

a pledge of their return, and that their lives should be spared, and their sacks filled with corn, on condition that they brought Benjamin the next time. To this proposal they do not appear to have made a direct reply ; but while such a stranger as he seemed to be, might have supposed they were conferring about their answer, they were constrained by remorse to ascribe their trouble to the retributive Providence of that God whose fear this mighty one mentioned with reverence. Under this impression they said one to another, “ *We were verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear : therefore is this distress come upon us.*” And Reuben answered them, saying, “ Spake I not unto you, saying, do not sin against the child ; and ye would not hear ? therefore, behold, also his blood is required.” Perhaps Joseph’s reference to the fear of God quickened the march of their reflections ; and together with the necessity of consultation, drew them more readily to mutual confession. While the perplexity into which this proposal threw them drew forth their expressions of remorse, the proposal itself was beyond their expressions to refuse ; and it insured both their return and the coming of Benjamin.

The money returned in their sacks increased their perplexity, though perhaps intended chiefly as an anonymous gift. It made them feel as though they had been in a land of enchantment. It was not of a piece with the other treatment they had received. The returning of the money in all the ten sacks *alike* was too methodical to be deemed an accident. And, as an instance of secret design, they could not account for it, except on the supposition that a pretence was sought to injure them.

The repeated proposals relative to their bringing Benjamin, afforded opportunities for observing how they spoke and felt respecting him and their father ; and whether

they resented Jacob's partiality for Benjamin, as they formerly did his fondness for Joseph.

In having the eleven brethren to dine with him at their second visit, Joseph gratified his brotherly affections while he pursued his generous policy. On this occasion he assumed the milder demeanour of one whose doubts were removed by the coming of their youngest brother, and who was now satisfied and friendly. He surprised them by placing them at his table according to their several ages; and no doubt greatly enjoyed the remarks which he overheard, and the expressive looks which he saw, as effects of their wonder. He thus kept up a degree of mystery; but in other respects encouraged them to be at ease. With design also, when he sent portions to his guests, he sent five times as much for Benjamin's mess as for any of theirs. He would see by their notice of this circumstance, whether it displeased them. He could not expect Benjamin to eat more than the rest, but he wished to see how they would look upon the preference thus shewn to Benjamin, to ascertain whether he was regarded with protecting kindness, or with such envious feelings as had made himself the victim of their jealousy. At this interview he so far laid aside the embarrassing sternness of his former dealings with them, that "they drank, and were merry with him:" their spirits were elevated by good cheer, and kind treatment; and they conversed among themselves with cheerful freedom.

Joseph probably saw enough when his brethren dined with him, to satisfy him that they had no active, jealous dislike against Benjamin; but he was desirous to ascertain by further trial whether there was any active, generous kindness towards him. By the stratagem of causing the silver cup to be found in Benjamin's sack, Joseph severely tested his brethren's affection for Benjamin, and laid them under a necessity of shewing by actions whether they

would warmly defend or coldly abandon the favourite son of their father. Benjamin had succeeded to that place in Jacob's partial fondness which Joseph formerly possessed. Each of the brethren knew that Benjamin was preferred to him by their father. Had they on this account hated Benjamin as they formerly hated Joseph, and felt no more dutiful regard to their aged father's feelings than they did twenty-one years before, Joseph would have seen them leave Benjamin in slavery with as little compunction as they showed in selling himself to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver.

5. While watching the effect of his various contrivances and experiments to try the spirit of his brethren, Joseph's penetrating sagacity was tempered with steady kindness of purpose, and with emotions of yearning tenderness, to control which required all his self-command.

When he heard their mutual confessions and reproaches relative to their guilt concerning himself, "he turned himself about from them, and wept, and returned to them again, and communed with them." When he saw Benjamin among them, "*he made haste*" to shorten the conversation, "for his bowels did yearn upon his brother; and he sought where to weep: and he entered into his chamber, and wept there. "And he washed his face" (to remove the marks of weeping), "and went out, and refrained himself." And when Judah concluded his generous and pathetic speech in behalf of Benjamin, "Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him." And when the Egyptians were gone out, "he wept aloud," before he had power to speak a word of explanation to his astonished brethren; who saw the uncontrollable and unaccountable emotion of this mysterious personage, while they were still waiting for his reply to Judah's magnanimous petition, and still ignorant of the name and race of this mighty ruler, whose hardness had terrified



them, and whose passionate loud weeping now as utterly perplexed.

II. The termination of the mystery.

1. Joseph had *sufficient* and *weighty reasons* for putting an end to the assumed strangeness and harshness by which he had been so effectually concealed from the knowledge of his brethren.

His *prudence* and his *policy* were satisfied by what he now saw of the altered spirit of his brethren. Benjamin's youth had removed from him the appearance of direct and immediate competition with his elder brethren.

Joseph's *heart* was *overcome* by the yearnings of natural affection, and could no longer endure the restraint of a cold disguise. Above all his tenderest feeling was irresistibly touched by Judah's pathetic reference to the *evil* that *might come* upon his *father*.

2. It was a family affair he had now to lay open—a matter of exquisite delicacy and great moment.

• He therefore excluded strangers, and said what was understood to mean—*Leave me alone with these men—I will settle with them in private.*

3. The *manner* in which he then *made himself known*, is one of the most moving and natural scenes in all human experience.

He *wept aloud*—his long restrained feelings broke loose, as soon as the Egyptians had withdrawn, with such vehement and loud weeping that he was heard beyond the apartment by those who had withdrawn. And this burst of uncontrollable emotion took place in the presence of the eleven brethren, before Joseph had power to speak a word of explanation.

And when at length he began to speak—unable to master either his thoughts or his utterance so as to treat the news he had to tell in a gradual and orderly way, or with any preparatory observations, such as a cold and

formal character might have introduced, he relieved his swelling heart at once by saying to the astonished brethren—who had been terrified with his severity, and then amazed and bewildered by the (to them) unaccountable circumstances of his loud weeping—"I (am) Joseph—Doth my father yet live?"

4. His brethren could not answer him, for they were terrified at his presence.

He who had just before spoken with such natural and moving eloquence—Judah—was speechless as well as the rest.

Their minds were overwhelmed, distracted, confounded, with a torrent of *recollections*, *conjectures*, and *sudden emotions*.

Recollections—of his *features*, his *dreams*, their *cruelty* to his helpless youth, his sorrowing father, who had mourned him as dead, and had been in awful ignorance of his state for twenty years—the *guilty secret* they had to keep from Jacob so long, after deceiving him with the torn and bloody coat of many colours.

Conjectures—as to what might have been the vicissitudes through which Joseph had risen so high, as to what might be the state of his feelings towards *them*, as to the motives of his late mysterious proceedings. There was a blank of twenty years in their knowledge of Joseph's history, from the day they sold him, to the time when they heard this dignified and powerful stranger say, I—Joseph—my father—doth he yet live?

With what flashes of rapid supposition would their thoughts fill up the blank. They saw Joseph's dignity and power, they had heard his startling statement, but they knew nothing of the captive steward, of the great Potiphar and his wife, the prison, the butler and baker, Pharaoh's dreams and the interpretations.

Sudden emotions—of shame, remorse, fear, wonder,

amazement at the *mastery* of Providence over the passions, plans, and efforts of men as displayed before their eyes by the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams through their own unwitting and hostile instrumentality; and terrible suspense as to the intentions of the injured brother whom they saw before them in irresistible authority.

Then followed explanations which shewed plainly Joseph's forgiving disposition and affectionate purposes.

### III. The instruction to be drawn from the whole.

1. The character of Joseph appears almost an exemplification of ideal perfection, with the advantage of such incidents, vicissitudes, and signs of strong and natural feeling, as place it fully within the region, in the very centre, of human sympathies.

Whatever has been objected against the perfection of Joseph's character—such as his protesting by the life of Pharaoh, etc., admits of easy and probable explanation.

2. If such perfection was attained in the patriarchal times, what are our privilege and duty?

3. We behold in this history not only the conduct of Joseph and his brethren, but the conduct of Providence also. This is so prominent throughout, that in many parts of the series one might say, This is the finger of God.

4. Though we may not be authorised to say that Joseph was a type of Christ, there is much in his history to remind us of Jesus.

I am Joseph.

I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.

5. As the brethren stood in speechless confusion before Joseph, so will the unbelievers be troubled and confounded at the presence of the Saviour.

“Those who set at naught and sold Him,  
Deeply wailing shall the true Messiah see.”

6. As the *dreams* of Joseph were fulfilled, and that

through the instrumentality of those who hated him, so shall the decree that every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus is the Lord.

7. The difference between the slavery of Joseph and his subsequent grandeur is infinitely exceeded by the difference between the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus. That difference has long ago been manifest to those who clamoured for His condemnation.

8. As Joseph provided for the nourishment of those who had most deeply injured him, with their families, and sent them away with kindness, so that they greeted their aged father with the sudden burst of good news—Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt,—so Jesus, who dying said, “Father, forgive them,” sent Peter to say, “Unto you first, God, having raised up His Son, Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities,”—and Jesus is yet alive, and to Him is given all power in heaven and earth—He was heard saying, “I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and of death.”

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## GIDEON.

“ And Gideon came to Jordan and passed over, he and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing.”—JUDGES viii. 4.

THERE are serious objections to what is sometimes improperly called spiritualizing. Hence Mr. Wesley advises Preachers to “ be sparing in spiritualizing or allegorizing.” That way of expounding sacred history has often led to plausible and mischievous error ; and when even the truth has been taught in that manner, it has been deprived of its proper authority by being placed on wrong and weak foundations.

But, when an earnest purpose of instruction appears in the scriptural accounts of ancient times, or of whose deeds of men of God which were wrought in faith,—or when the facts stated involve important principles,—to lay open such principles, and to draw from such statements the implied and intended instruction, is one of the most interesting and profitable exercises of the understanding.

The former parts of these chapters include statements *avowedly* connected with *principles*, and exemplifying *rules of divine dealing*.

The sure *connexion between Sin and Misery* was exemplified when the sins of the Israelites were nationally punished by the instrumentality of the Midianites, who mightily oppressed and grievously plundered the country for seven years ; taking away the crops after the Israelites had sown their fields ; and by the yearly repetition of these remorseless ravages, rendering the land desolate and producing the horrors of famine.

When the misery of the people had become intolerable and overwhelming, and they began to cry unto the Lord, the *cause* and *intention* of the divine *chastisements* were

pointed out by the message of a prophet, who was sent to remind them of the glorious deliverances God had wrought for their forefathers, and of his solemn prohibition of idolatry. When, therefore, "*they cried to the Lord*" because of the Midianites, they were put in remembrance that because of their sins, in forsaking God for idols, they were given into the power of their enemies. Thus the *first answer* to their prayer was *the sending of a prophet to set their sins before them*.

The *necessity and benefit of repentance* were also exemplified. After they had been taught to view their sins in connexion with their sufferings, an angel commissions Gideon—divinely chosen from an idolatrous family, when he was secretly threshing wheat to hide it from the Midianites—and gives him encouraging signs; convincing him that his call to deliver Israel was from the Lord, and no delusion; but exercising his faith in smaller duties and hazards, to prepare him for greater.

*Fruits of repentance*, answerable to amendment of life.

Then on the re-appearance of the Midianites at the usual season—the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon—who blew a trumpet, and sent messengers to the nearest tribes; whereupon thirty-two thousand assembled,—the Spirit having come upon them also, so as to dispose them *to obey* the call of Gideon.

The *necessity of faith* in order to divine blessing was then exemplified. The faith of Gideon and his host was strengthened by the miraculous sign of the dew—first on the *fleece only*—then on the *ground only*. Being thus assured that God was with them, and that He could do every thing, they were prepared to trust in His Almighty arm.

Then their *strengthened faith* was *tried*—in a manner which exemplified God's care to *exclude boasting* and to *hide pride from man*, yet at the same time to *employ human agency in the obedience of faith*.—Two divine directions

reduced the army first from thirty-two thousand to ten thousand,—then from ten thousand to three hundred ; and this was done on an avowed principle—the same which is declared by the Apostle, quoting the Prophet in 1 Corinthians i., 31, “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

The fulness of meaning in the divine proceedings thus far, the great importance of the practical lessons taught—and the striking agreement of the whole with great principles declared by the evangelical prophet, Isaiah xl., and the apostle of the Gentiles—afford sufficient warrant for considering the text—a part of the same case—as intentionally suggestive.

Paul places this case in Hebrews xi. among the examples of the operation and power of faith.

Our sober commentator Benson says—

Thus *our spiritual warfare* must be prosecuted with *what strength we have, though we may have but little*. This is frequently the true Christian's case—like Gideon and his men—he is faint yet pursuing.

*Many spiritually-minded persons* have felt and applied the passage in this manner.

It is desirable to lead others to do so,—partly on account of the great value of the suggested instruction,—and partly because the same truth will sometimes be attended to and accepted as the *indirect lesson* of a lively and moving series of events, which, in the plain and direct form of doctrine or precept, would be disregarded.

It may therefore be useful to consider respecting Gideon and his men

I. The *facts* of the case.

II. The *principles* which they exemplify.

I. The Facts.

The text places us in the midst of events at an advanced

stage—when much was *done*—and much remaining to be done.

1. WHO and WHAT were they who were faint yet pursuing? The victorious three hundred, who had previously cried to the Lord. *Victorious*, by *divine power*, through *faith*, which produced *works*; they went forth, trusting in the Lord.

Gideon's *plan*—like Abraham's—an instance of inspired judgment and energy; of divine influence not superseding, but exalting and invigorating, the natural faculties;—not excluding, but producing, consummate generalship.

Night attack—pitchers, lights, trumpets—shouting.

Natural effects—bewilderment, amazement, terror, mutual slaughter and confused flight of the enemy: one hundred and twenty thousand slain.

2. The victors—WEAK in themselves felt their bodily *wants* and *infirmities*.

*Faint*, not in the sense of being faint-hearted; but weak and weary in body with toil and unrest, continued excitement and hunger.

What was this small and wearied band against the vast numbers of the enemy which still remained to be subdued?

3. Notwithstanding all disadvantages,—*their faintness* and the *multitude* of their *foes*,—they were YET PURSUING.

Noble spirits—Gideon like the Roman dictator Cincinnatus goes from his farm to conduct the deliverance of his country.

The three hundred, with their brave, inspired general—God's chosen men—were worthies as patriotic and devoted as king Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans, but more happy. Men worthy of such a commander.

Here was *mind*, controlling and supporting the feeble flesh.

*Fortitude*—regardless of ease or danger.

*Duty*, paramount—eager to finish the work.



These high qualities *sustained* them against the *petulant jealousy* of the Ephraimites, against *disappointments* and *insults* at Succoth and Penuel, where the people looked at the whole affair—not as men of faith, but as men of business—these heroic virtues sustained them, till the brave band had completed the victory by a circuitous march, and another sudden attack while it was yet dark—but still against fifty to one.

From this crowning victory, with the kings Zebah and Zalmunna for his captives, Gideon returned before the sun was up; having proved man doth not live by bread alone, nor conquer by mere numbers or strength.

## II. Principles which the facts exemplify.

1. We repeat that the preceding events in the context, show the connection of *sin and misery*; the intention of *divine chastisements*; the necessity and benefit of *repentance*; the required instrumentality of *faith* and *obedience*; God's care to *exclude boasting*.

Facts immediately connected with the text.

2. The Text as a comment on the events, suggests that all God's people indeed, are *called* to be *conquerors like Gideon and his men*—on the *same principles*.

Having first felt their guilt and misery, and having cried to the Lord, they have victory, by divine power, through faith. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." This faith, producing works, on a plan which—as Gideon's divine commission and miraculous encouragement did not supersede, but call forth and employ, masterly generalship and mighty energy—requires us to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;"—to be armed with the whole armour of God;—to think of and strive for "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."

A plan which as in Gideon's case, secures the glory to him whose grace is sufficient for us, and whose strength is made perfect in weakness.

All believers—amidst spiritual victories and triumphs are conscious of **WEAKNESS** in themselves—like Gideon and his men *faint*, yet not *despondent*, not *cowardly*, though *feeble*—needing the continual support of grace.

“Weaker than a bruised reed,  
Help we every moment need.”

3. Like Gideon and his men they are *called* and *able*, notwithstanding their weakness to be still *pursuing*.

God works by those who resist temptations to be weary in well-doing. The beginning, progress, and end of their salvation are by divine power and grace.

4. While thus *pursuing*, they are liable to be tried like Gideon and his men, with foolish, jealous, testy brethren, like the *Ephraimites*;—to be disappointed of expected help by selfish or churlish brethren—as at *Succoth* and *Penuel*.

5. In the case of the Christian's spiritual warfare, as in Gideon's case, there is a disproportion of forces.

*Enemies*—numerous, insolent, oppressive.

*Friends*—some faint-hearted, like the twenty-two thousand.

—— some foolish like the *Ephraimites*.

—— some selfish and churlish, like the men of *Succoth* and *Penuel*.

The faithful—weak and faint in themselves.

But—God is among his people—their sufficiency is of Him. Christ is their leader and commander, the Captain of their salvation—though they be as one in one hundred among nominal Christians.

The Spirit which came upon Gideon, still directs and counsels the hosts of the Lord and animates them with a divine principle of life and holy courage: to those who

still pursue and persevere the issue is certain. The happiness of deliverance—the peace after victory—glorious.

6. Not only converted individuals, but all true *churches* exemplify the same principles.

“Behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it ; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”

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## RUTH.

“And she said, Behold thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods : return thou after thy sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God : Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried : The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking to her.”—RUTH i. 15-18.

THREE leading purposes seem to have been intended by the Holy Ghost in causing this book to be written. One obviously was, as it appears from internal evidence, to inform us concerning the family and line of David ; with a part of whose genealogy the book concludes ; and thus to lead us to Christ ; his Divine descendant.

Another apparent purpose was, to display the Providence of God, as superintending the affairs, and guarding the interests of His people, directing the steps of those who acknowledge Him in all their ways, compensating and rewarding those who make sacrifices for the Lord's sake.

A very important purpose was, to exhibit a most impressive and encouraging example of religious decision, in one who had been an idolater.

The last of these considerations is, in this history, so essential an element, that without it, all the rest would have been wanting.

I consider, therefore, that these words contain the GERM of the whole book ; which certainly would never have been written, if what the text states had not taken place, as a part of the life and conduct of this holy woman.

Ruth's sayings anticipate some of the remote results of the course she was pondering. She looked far beyond the passing day. The plan of life which her few resolute

words so vividly told, was avowedly formed for *life*—for all time and for all eternity. We thus have occasion, from the text itself, to enquire how it fared with Ruth, through that great future she saw in her mind's eye, when she said, "Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

The sayings of Ruth lead us to consider—Her CRITICAL SITUATION, her SOLEMN DECISION, and the BLESSED RESULTS.

First, her CRITICAL SITUATION.

When Ruth and her sister-in-law, Orpah, set out with Naomi, on the way from the country of Moab, to Bethlehem in the land of Judah, it is likely their first intention was only to accompany her for a convenient distance, and then to bid her farewell and return to their home and friends. But when they halted for the purpose of parting, it seems they found in their own hearts a strength of affection for Naomi, beyond what they had been conscious of. They then proposed to go all the way with her. Against this she reasoned with them, on the common principles of worldly prudence. Orpah was prevailed upon ; kissed her mother-in-law, and departed.

"*But Ruth clave unto her.*" Then Naomi said, "Thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods ; return thou after thy sister-in-law."

At this point, let us look at the situation of Ruth ; the circumstances amidst which she was making up her mind.

1. As to the time then passed in her own history. There can be no doubt that this would then and there be re-produced, before her mind's eye in rapid review.

She had been connected by marriage with a sickly and declining but pious family of Israelites ; to her a foreign race : her own nation and relatives were idolaters.

The father-in-law, her husband, and his brother had died, after ten years residence in her country. When they

were removed, it was natural for the childless widow, Naomi, to look with dislike on scenes in which all she saw spoke to her heart of losses which nothing earthly could retrieve; hence her determination to return to Bethlehem. She had come to the land of Moab in a time of famine; and "she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread." A Jewish commentary (the Chaldee paraphrast) says concerning her sons, "because they transgressed the word of the Lord, and joined in affinity with a strange people, therefore their days were cut short." It is remarkable that the names of the two brothers, Mahlon and Chilion, are said to have signified, respectively, sickness and consumption.

It is probable that by that time this family, of strangers and sojourners, was in sore poverty. In Judea they were owners of land. In time of famine they had sold their land, when land was worth little, and food was at a famine price, until the next year of Jubilee, hence the right of redeeming it from the purchaser or his heirs. They had come to the land of Moab for bread. There the decaying house had been wasted by sickness and death; and had doubtless grown poorer. How many touching scenes, of suffering, and sorrow, and tenderness, would Ruth remember, when the question was—whether she should part from Naomi, or go all the way with her.

2. As to the probable future.

In the case of her persisting to accompany Naomi, she had no encouraging worldly prospects.

She was likely to share the poverty of Naomi, who appears to have acquired the unpleasant habit of complaining; a habit which repels instead of attracting sympathy: likely, as Naomi pointed out to her, to remain a childless widow: likely, also, according to the course of nature, to survive Naomi, after witnessing her growing

infirmities, and watching her dying hours; and then to be left, a lonely and disconsolate stranger, far from the scenes and the friends of her early years; and at last, to be herself *dying alone*, unattended, unbefriended, in a strange land.

3. As to the time then present.

When she halted with Naomi in the way, she had the example of her sister-in-law, and the arguments of her mother-in-law, in favour of going back to Moab and *its gods*.

It is somewhat startling to find Naomi advising Ruth to go back to her people, and *their gods*. But we may imagine, with some probability, the possible motives of Naomi, for urging Ruth, at least *in words*, to return with Orpah: I say, *at least, in words*. She might have a prudent fear of the possible murmurings of a daughter-in-law, poor and discontented; and might be therefore guarding herself from any words, on her own part, which could afterwards be cast up to her, as having persuaded Ruth to share her distressed condition. But her mention of the *gods* of Moab suggested views entirely opposite to her direct expressions; views which might perhaps become more strongly suggestive by some peculiar pathos in speaking, some tone or cadence which filled Ruth's mind with solemn memories, and perhaps recalled her best thoughts of the departed. She had been favoured with opportunities to know something of the faith and hope of this Hebrew family, and might have seen in the wasting lives and dying hours of Elimelech and his sons, something of the nature and blessedness of even infirm and wavering piety, such as theirs seems to have been. She had been enabled to estimate their religion, in comparison with the vain and wretched idolatry of her country; and had the means of being convinced that *Jehovah alone was God*.

Her situation made some choice needful and inevitable. It seemed to say—as to either alternative,—*now or never!*

But it did not, on worldly principles, point to the choice she made.

*Secondly*, her SOLEMN DECISION.

In these impressive circumstances, doubtless under a gracious influence from the same Lord who, long afterwards, opened the heart of Lydia, Ruth, CHOSE Naomi, the aged, dejected, poor, complaining widow, for her sole companion and friend, quitting all others; leaving father and mother, as it is said, in Ch. II. v. 11, to go with her to a country she never saw; to lodge with her, though in such a cottage as a poor widow might occupy at Bethlehem. During their companionship in long continued and severe family afflictions, the hearts of Ruth and Naomi had been trained to feel deeply and to sympathize strongly. They had watched and mourned together, for the same lingering and departing sufferers. They shared together cherished sorrows and endeared remembrances. They had learned to know each other in the house of mourning. Naomi seems to have thought she did well to be querulous, and her habitual complainings must sometimes have been wearisome; but Ruth seems to have had a considerate generosity in judging; prepared and disposed to prize solid worth amidst wants and infirmities.

Under the same gracious influence which then prevailed in her thoughts and feelings, she CHOSE Israel, the church of the living God, the *people* in covenant with God, for *her* people; finally leaving her own country and nation.

In connexion with the cherished hope of Israel, which was the hope of a glorious incarnate Redeemer, she CHOSE Naomi's God, the Lord Jehovah, for her God: Jehovah God All-sufficient: the all-pervading, all-knowing, ever living Being: "whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting."—Micah v. 2. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.

Farewell to Chemosh, and all the idols of Moab!



Let us look at the *sentiments* which appear to have actuated Ruth in making, avowing, and keeping her *choice*.

Ruth made her choice *affectionately*.

Personal and family attachments appear to have been made instrumental towards the awakening and enlightening of her conscience, and the developing and strengthening of her religious affections, as motives to consideration.

She avowed her choice with characteristic firmness : expressing a settled and unalterable purpose, that she might put an end at once to all attempts to dissuade or hinder her. It is not in a spirit of hesitation or compromise that a great and real change of mind can be wrought out, and practically maintained. All attempts to reconcile the world to holiness, by half-measures, will fail. Thoroughness and straightforwardness in the path of duty, are really easier and safer, than any of the most plausible and cunningly-devised middle courses. The weak compliances of those who think to shew their moderation, by halting and wavering, near the boundaries of right from wrong, will always be used to the hurt of the wavering soul. To the invisible powers who wield the weapons of temptation, such concessions to worldliness, will be as the joints of the harness through which Ahab received his mortal wound ; but the bow will be drawn, not at a venture, but with cruel clearness of aim. Is there not reason to fear that many are lost for want of the conscientious firmness, that is habitually prepared to give a prompt and full denial to all pleadings about *more* or *less* of sin.

Ruth made her choice *solemnly* ; fortifying her resolve and avowal, by calling to mind the most moving and awful considerations—her dying hour, and her belief in divine judgment and retribution. “Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.” She strove to make her choice final and irretrievable ; presenting it to

Naomi and herself in the most impressive form. She acted like that ancient commander who, entering an enemy's country from the sea, burnt his ships, that his soldiers might be led to think, *not*, how shall we escape; but, solely, how shall we secure victory? She speaks not as one entering upon a doubtful enterprise, or trying an experiment; but as one who looked forward to the end of all things,—as anticipating effects throughout her own everlasting being: not as having a month's mind to religion, but as choosing, once for all, for all time, for all eternity, by a well considered and irreversible decision. The danger of trusting in our own resolutions is often very justly urged on grounds of religious prudence; but the danger really lies in forgetting or neglecting the charge,—“Trust in the Lord, with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding.” Nothing great, or even safe, can be accomplished in the concerns of the soul, *without* strong resolutions, made and kept in the fear of God, and in humble reliance on his guiding eye and succouring strength.

In the crisis of Ruth's case, we see the proper characteristic strength of a feminine-nature, developed by the influence of the affections, and, through *Grace*, resulting in sublime foresight and invincible determination. Ruth seems not to have been aware that she was acting with a glorious greatness of mind, but in the supreme judgment of the Divine Spirit, who is the primary author of all Holy Scripture, she did that day an everlasting deed, which deserved to be had in perpetual remembrance. Learn hence whom the Lord delighteth to honour.

*Thirdly.* The sayings of Ruth lead us to enquire—How it fared with her through that great future she pondered, while she halted on the way to Bethlehem, and was making up her mind.

1. She gained her immediate object. There was an end

of objection and remonstrance, on the part of Naomi. "When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking to her." John Foster remarks, in substance, that it is sometimes amusing to see how the space clears around a man, when those who would willingly embarrass or obstruct him, but are unable to crush him, perceive in his conduct the signs of a strong and persevering resolution. In such cases, opponents who are not very much in earnest, shrink from the protracted toil and difficulty of their foreseen task, and give up from weariness. And the thoughtful moralist, Johnson, advises those who discover that their system of life has been wrong, to change it at once and entirely; without trusting to delusive plans of moderate and gradual reformation. He who deliberately intends only *moderate* amendment of life, is not sincere and thorough in hatred to sin; and he who calculates upon *gradual* change from bad to better, forgets the enthralling influence of habit. These poor and spiritless schemes will fail, and deserve to be defeated. "The Lord preserveth the simple."

2. For some time, Ruth found her chief reward in her own good and kind feelings, the friendship of Naomi, and a solemn gladness of heart, in serving and pleasing the true God. These, however, were great and precious realities, sweet recompenses, the better part,—far more real and valuable than those outward and visible signs of the profit of godliness, which are often chiefly regarded and recommended. "Doth Job fear God for nought?" This cavil of the accuser of the brethren, was like most of his temptations; a falsehood founded on a fact: a malicious imputation of refined and far-seeing selfishness to Job, on the ground that Divine Providence had so guarded and prospered him, as to make his personal godliness plainly and eminently profitable. But Ruth had commenced her decided course in the spirit and practice of sacrifice; and

with motives widely apart from selfish calculations. She had repelled views of worldly prudence; and made her choice on spiritual grounds.

3. For a season her constancy was well-trying. She shared the poverty of Naomi to a degree, which, to a selfish and haughty spirit, however romantic, would have been intensely mortifying. They arrived in the beginning of barley-harvest; and so real was their poverty, that it was quite a valuable consideration for these two poor, godly women, to obtain as much corn as one of them might be permitted to glean after the reapers in the harvest field. It was Ruth's own humble and cheerful proposal. She said to Naomi, "Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace." She had the greatness of mind to be not ashamed of poverty and labour. And she continued to glean "to the end of barley-harvest and of wheat-harvest, and dwelt with her mother in law."

4. But by swift steps her worldly state improved.

The difficult stranger who, as this book says, had "left her father and her mother, and the land of her nativity, and had come unto a people she knew not heretofore," found among the Israelites of Bethlehem, a friendly and open-hearted people, who were kind to her in her poverty, rejoiced with her when better days came, and admired and commended her virtuous behaviour.

In a few days after the two harvests, a course of events took place,—approved by the national law and by the system of manners among the Israelites at Bethlehem,—which in fairness should be regarded from their point of view, and tried by their standard, rather than by modern laws and examples. These events wrought a great change in the condition of Naomi and Ruth. Naomi sold her land, in the manner required by the law and practice of those times concerning the redemption of estates of

inheritance. The poor widow, Ruth, became the wife of rich Boaz;—a good, religious, respected and amiable man; a prince by descent; and, as the simple phrase of those days describes him, “a mighty man of wealth.”

The childless daughter of Moab became a mother in Israel; an ancestress of the long line of the kings of Judah, David himself being her glorious great grandson.

She, the alien and foreigner, who had chosen Jeremiah for her God, obtained what the daughters of Israel earnestly desired, and the hope of which was intimately combined with their general wish for offspring; an honourable and eminent place as a mother in the sacred line of the promised “seed of the woman,” of whom the wonderful child came, the mysterious Son of Man, and Son of God, “who is over all, God blessed for ever.” Rom. ix. 5.

She who, in choosing to follow Naomi, seemed likely to pass away into oblivion, and leave none after her to cherish her memory, will be for ever remembered; and is one of the only two women whose names are prefixed to books of the Holy Scriptures; being in this way peculiarly distinguished by the honour that comes from God. Wherever the Bible is read, it extends and preserves the memory of Ruth. Concerning Mary of Bethany, Jesus said, “Where-soever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.” Thus the act which Judas censured, but Jesus approved, was rewarded with an everlasting fame, which is, in a manner and degree pre-eminently marked, the honour that cometh from God. Ruth, like Mary, had “*chosen* that good part, which shall not be taken from her.” And that Spirit of Grace, by whose Divine influence, Ruth was enabled to choose in faith and in the spirit of sacrifice, has so set the seal of his approbation to the principle of her decision, as amply and signally to fulfil what was spoken to her, as a poor gleaner, by the kind and pious

Boaz. "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee, of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

Above all,—as by the avowed principles of her choice, Ruth confessed her trust in that incarnate deliverer, who was the cherished Hope of Israel; and as she persevered through discouragements and difficulties, with exemplary fortitude and humility—virtues more naturally and closely connected than is usually supposed—we have no reason to doubt that she died as she had lived, still trusting in the promised Redeemer, and thus "*abiding under the shadow of the Almighty.*"

She was thus compensated and rewarded, according to the law afterwards declared by her Divine descendant, at every point where she had made sacrifices. The temporal blessings she obtained were far more and greater than she had ever taken into her anticipations;—exemplifying what was afterwards taught—"Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.—There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

Many who would scorn to imitate Ruth's humility, are, in point of character, unworthy to be named with her.

We may never be placed in circumstances like those of Ruth in particulars, in things outward and temporal; but we have been, or shall be, in situations as critical, and as momentous in their influence on our future; turning points on which great consequences are dependent; cases in which what we *do* or *neglect* will involve helps or hinderances in our way of duty and of safety, through long periods.

Both our interest and our duty require—that we should imitate Ruth's religious decision in its characteristic qualities, of self-denial, unreservedness and unchangeableness.

If we adopt Ruth's principles, and act accordingly, with

perseverance, we shall be equally rewarded ; perhaps not in the same manner ; but her best portion we may partake.

Some of you may afford, to the young and inexperienced, the advantages of pious connexions, and are under a plain obligation to do so. Those who *can* give are *bound* to give such spiritual light and aid as the family of Naomi afforded to Ruth,—the advantages of the society and example of the people of God.

Some of you *have* this advantage, and ought, like Ruth, to lay to heart the facts, and truths thus presented to your attention ; and so to consider your ways, as to adopt her choice ; and make it your life-work to persevere in the same course of action.

Some of you have been reminded of the time when you happily chose the Lord's people for your people, and the Lord for your God. Still walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing.

Some of you may have pious connexions, like Naomi, whom you love and reverence ; but whose example you have not yet begun to follow. *When* will you begin ? The want of a beginning may be fatal.

Some of you may, like Orpah, have accompanied your pious friends to a certain extent ; and then gone back to your people—your worldly friends,—and *their* gods. Consider that whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God, and that worldliness is, essentially, idolatry ; which God earnestly and solemnly warns and entreats his people to avoid, saying in Jeremiah, xliv., 4, “O do not this abominable thing that I hate.” Will you, being warned, cleave to worldly friends and their ways ; and deliberately, *do the abominable thing which God hates ?*

Some of you—may we hope ? are *now* making up, or *have* made up your minds, to go *all the way with your pious friends*.

Perhaps this day may be a decisive day in the life of some of you, a day which may have effects to all eternity.

## SAUL'S DISTRESS.

“And Samuel said unto Saul, Wherefore hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed, for the Philistines make war upon me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams; therefore, I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.”—1 SAMUEL xxviii. 15.

A REMARKABLE counterpart of this passage occurs in chapter xxx, verse 6. “And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters; but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

It is an important help to the interpretation of the Scriptures, to keep in remembrance the essential sameness of human nature in all countries, among all races of men, and its permanency in all times and generations, whatever may be the distinguishing peculiarities of the circumstances and spirit of the age.

Another principle to be kept in view for the same purpose, is the permanent sameness of the way of salvation; the truth that the divinely appointed method of salvation, has in every age had Christ for the foundation; and that salvation by Him, has always been *by grace through faith*; and that under all the dispensations, God has required from His people a *rational, spiritual, and willing service*, the obedience of a *believing* and loving heart. In this book of the Scriptures there is abundant evidence that the divine religion, which is more fully developed and expanded in the New Testament, is substantially the same religion, which, in principle and spirit, was known and enjoyed by holy patriarchs and true Israelites. To observe how the same principles which are laid down in the doctrinal, arc



illustrated in the historical parts of God's word, is an inexhaustible source of interest and instruction.

Had the Bible no pretensions to divine authority, it would be eagerly read as the most entertaining book in existence. If it were *not* interesting, still it was written for our instruction in the things of God, and therefore claims our constant study and perusal; if it were as dull as a conveyance or an act of parliament, it contains the title deeds of our inheritance, and should be carefully pondered.

The narratives of the first three kings are specially attractive and impressive. Saul, David, and Solomon stand conspicuous in the Jewish history. They had greater dominion, their personal characters are strongly marked, their actions are particularly recorded. Saul was the first, David the most active and heroic, Solomon the wisest, greatest, and most magnificent of all the Jewish kings. The personal history of Saul is the most melancholy in the Scriptures, though he was far from being the worst of men. These sacred biographies were given for great purposes, and should be studied as illustrative of divine conduct.

Our text leads us to consider

I. The circumstances of Saul's distress, as stated by himself.

II. The causes.

III. The desperate means to which he had recourse in this gloomy crisis, alluded to in Samuel's question and Saul's answer.

IV. What success he had in using means so improper and desperate.

I. The circumstances of Saul's distress, as stated by him to Samuel.

1. "The Philistines make war upon me." They were invading his dominions with a powerful army. When

Saul saw their host, "he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled," not as a coward, but from a fear that God would not bless his arms.

2. "God is departed from me." This is matter of history recorded in chapter xii. verse 14.

God had previously, by the gifts of His Spirit, endowed Saul with the judgment and magnanimity necessary for his high office. When God departed from him, an evil spirit troubled him, a deep settled melancholy aggravated by extraordinary and powerful satanic temptations, perhaps, occasionally by demoniacal possession.

3. "God answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams." He was utterly perplexed in his own judgments, he had experienced, during the life of Samuel, the vast advantage of having a counsellor for emergencies, who spoke the mind of God, but now Samuel was dead, he himself had not access to God, there appears to have been no prophet in the land but Gad, who counselled David; (see xxii. 5,) but seems to have had no intercourse with Saul, he had no prophetic dreams, which sometimes have been a means of divine direction, and his connexion with the priests, by whom the Israelites could on proper occasions enquire of God, was cut off by his own act.

4. His distress was extreme—"I am *sore* distressed."

II. The causes of his distress.

1. *Impatience* and *unbelief*.

Saul's impatience, and want of the faith of Gideon, led to his usurpation of the office of the priesthood, thus presumptuously and profanely attempting to change the Israelitish constitution which God himself had appointed: see chapter xiii. 8, 14, and xiv. 35. For a similar offence Uzziah was smitten with leprosy, 2 Chronicles xxvi. 16.

2. *Unfaithfulness*.

His breach of trust in the commission he received to destroy the Amalekites, in which, from fear of the people,

he gave up his duty, and acted as if he had power to alter or modify God's directions. See chapter xv. Like Achan, and like Annanias and Sapphira.

3. *Envious jealousy.*

His yielding to a mean spirit of envy, jealousy, hatred, and ingratitude towards David, who at length found it necessary to be continually on his guard, and to distrust even the oaths of Saul, even after he had twice magnanimously spared his life, when he could have put him to death at a blow.

4. *Cruelty.*

His wanton cruelty in putting all the priests to the sword with their families, Abiathar only escaping, (xxii. 9, etc.,) and upon mere suspicion—if his suspicion had been *correct*, he spared not the *innocent*. How different from his conduct to Agag. When he was sent to execute the displeasure of God, he spared Agag and the best of the cattle. When his own violent anger and suspicion impelled him, he burnt and destroyed everything.

5. The *comprehensive* cause was his departure from God.

These were the acts of one who had resisted and lost the Spirit of God.

III. The desperate expedient to which he had recourse.

1. Had Samuel been living, he would at once have gone to him: he had found this prophet severe, but faithful, and he seems to have felt a true veneration for his high and holy character.

2. The recollection that Samuel, if alive, would have been his best resource next to God, suggested the wish to see him living or *dead*, and led him to think that if he could only evoke the spirit of Samuel, he should obtain counsel as from God.

3. In his *better days*, by enforcing the divine law against them, Saul had driven out of his kingdom those who used enchantments, and who had, or pretended to have, inter-

course with evil spirits : hence persons of this class were not numerous.

4. *Now*, in his *evil days*, despairing of success by *natural means*, and not finding *God with him* as in former wars, his distress suggested an extraordinary mode of seeking preternatural aid. Therefore he said unto his servants, "Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her." He, no doubt, recollected the unlawfulness of the course he was now adopting : but he felt a *reckless* impatience of uncertainty, a desire to know even the worst ; and perhaps satisfied himself by reasoning, that, *though* he applied to one who dealt with Satan, it was *not* Satan's aid he wished for—he sought counsel of the *dead*—not of the woman, nor of her familiar spirit.

5. "And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night : and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee. And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that hath familiar spirits, and the wizard's, out of the land : wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die ? And Saul sware to her by the Lord, saying, As the Lord liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing. Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee ? And he said, Bring me up Samuel. And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice : and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me ? for thou art Saul. And the king said unto her, Be not afraid : for what sawest thou ? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of ? And she said, An old man cometh up ; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived

that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself."

6. Samuel appeared, *not compelled by incantations*, and the suddenness, the reality, and the awful sanctity of his appearance seem to have astonished and alarmed the sorceress. She probably intended her familiar spirit to assume his form, but, before she could commence her jugglery, *Samuel* APPEARED.

7 There is nothing to countenance the surmise that Saul was deceived. "And Samuel said, Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war upon me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."

IV. What success had he in using such improper and desperate means?

1. He obtained no direction.
2. His worst apprehensions were confirmed.
3. The transference of his kingdom to David was re-asserted.
4. The death of himself and his sons on the morrow was predicted, and the miserable defeat of his army.
5. Some have charitably understood the prediction of his death as not inconsistent with his ultimate happiness.

"What do these solemn words portend?  
A gleam of hope when life shall end:  
Thou and thy sons, though slain, shall be  
To-morrow in repose with me!

"Not in a state of hellish pain,  
If Saul with Samuel doth remain;  
Not in a state of damned despair,  
If loving Jonathan be there!"

6. Charles Wesley, the author of these lines, probably thought that Saul's falling on his sword was not a com-

mon case of suicide. He was already wounded, perhaps mortally: and one commentator suggests that the dread he expressed of the uncircumcised, was probably conscientious.

7. But—he was no idolater—he was in some points zealous for God. He was an able and active prince, and in some things politic as well as brave. His last battle is an instance of bravery almost beyond example.

8. He was one of the many who *mistake* rashness for decision, and his heart was *corrupted by power*. His first and last errors sprung from want of faith, and from impatience of suspense (a weakness which many mistake for strength), and a fretful restlessness in the season of perplexity which impelled him so that he felt as if he must, and therefore would, do something, though he knew not what to do. “Commit thy way unto the Lord.” “Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him.” “Cease from anger and forsake wrath.” “Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.”

This portion of sacred history affords indubitable proof, in opposition to some shallow divines, that the ancient Jews were no Sadducees, but aware of a separate state of departed souls.

Saul's conduct shews the folly and danger of superstitious persons attempting to pry unlawfully into futurity.

Observe the contrast between Saul and David, about the same time that the former applied to the witch of Endor, “David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

The case of Saul is a terrible example of the peril of *departing* from God by presumptuous sins. God departed from *him*, answering him no more by dreams, prophets, or oracles; nor by that spirit of counsel and might which came upon him after his anointing. He presents an impressive instance of the fearful efficacy of God's dis-

pleasure in *making wretched*. Though prophets and oracles have ceased, *still* God intimates his awful displeasure to those who have departed from him, by *answering no more*, withdrawing the light and comfort, the guiding and animating influence of His Holy Spirit, till they humble themselves, repent and do the first works.

The doubtfulness of Saul's end should stimulate us to seek, and to hold fast, a *present salvation*.

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## RIZPAH ; OR GOD'S REMEMBRANCE OF OPPRESSED BONDSMEN.

“ And Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. And it was told David what Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.”—2 SAM. xxi. 10, 11.

THOUGH very different from such passages as are usually, and properly, chosen for the subjects of discourses intended for general edification,—these words preserve an affecting portion of personal history, recorded under the unerring direction of the omniscient Spirit of God. They afford, as apparently they were *designed* to afford,—weighty practical lessons for all time.

By these events important principles of human nature and of divine government are exemplified and illustrated. Attention is invited to the FACTS and the LESSONS of this remarkable portion of inspired history.

### I. The FACTS.

1. The narrative leads the thoughts of the reader about four hundred years backward, to the early part of Joshua's government. The ninth chapter of Joshua states the motives and the circumstances of the deception by which the Gibeonites imposed upon the elders of Israel, who received and credited messengers from Gibeon, on the plausible but imperfect evidence of their dry and mouldy victuals. Supposing them as they professed to be, ambassadors from the people of “ a very far country,” Joshua and the princes hastily made a solemn league with them. The princes of the congregation “ asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord ;” yet they “ made peace with them,” and made a league with them. In the name of Him, whose



counsel they *might* have obtained, but had neglected to seek, "the princes of the congregation swore unto them." Thus, by the pen of faithful Joshua, who having been with them in this affair, so takes his share of the blame, their rashness and neglect of duty are acknowledged. Benson remarks, "it is probable, if God had been consulted, he would have consented to the sparing of the Gibeonites; yet it should have been done with more caution, and with an obligation upon them to embrace the true religion." Yet that this league was lawful and binding appears—as Benson further says—"Because Joshua and all the princes, upon the review, concluded it so to be, and spared them accordingly—and because God punished the violation of it long after." 2 Sam. xxi., 1. In three days it was discovered that the Gibeonites were not people of a far country, but near neighbours, who had obtained this league by false pretences; and then the multitude "murmured against the princes." As Benson says—"Both from proneness to censure the actions of their rulers; and from the desire of the spoil of these cities." But the princes being by this time made wary by reflection on the embarrassment which had resulted from their former haste—proceeded with considerate fairness. They reproached the Gibeonites for having gained an advantage by fraud; but remembered that they had sworn unto them by the "Lord God of Israel." Regarding both parts of the case, they proposed a revised form of the treaty, which having been accepted by the Gibeonites, implied a recognition by the two peoples of guiding principles of equity; which principles it is interesting to contemplate in conjunction with the time and circumstances of the case; so trying to the self-love of both nations; and affording so critical a test of the wise foresight and the faithful obedience of the princes of the congregation.

Concerning Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, the Scriptures

do not give a history; but they record brief fragments of information respecting her, which are very suggestive. It will soon be three thousand years since she was on earth among the living. Concerning most of the departed, it may be said, as it is observed in Ecclesiastes, "There is no remembrance of former things;" yet the name and memory of these persons who are incidentally mentioned in the sacred writings, are thereby preserved through all time; *like the wing of a fly in amber*; and in connexion with testimonies which stir deep reflection, and impart precious instruction. Rizpah is casually named in chapter iii. verse 7, of the second book of Samuel, in a part of Saul's personal history; and again in this place. She had been the favourite of king Saul; and after his death was the favourite of Abner, his cousin, the most powerful chief of Saul's house. It is likely that rare personal beauty was one source of her influence in both cases. It is remarkable that she who had borne two sons to Saul, should have retained beauty or influence so long after Saul's death. Her influence with him had probably been exerted, after the usual manner of royal favourites, in turning his passions and prejudices to account, for the advantage of herself and her children; and, as the sequel of her story seems to imply, to the cost and ruinous injury of the oppressed Gibeonites. Concluding after three successive years of famine that such a calamity, *impressively repeated*, could not have come upon Israel without cause, *nor without God*, David enquired of the Lord. "And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites." Ages before the time when "it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done;" Joshua and the princes had made that covenant with the Gibeonites, which after their deceit had been discovered was deliberately modified and confirmed, in a manner which bound Israel to mercy, and

the Gibeonites to permanent, but sacred and not excessive servitude.

The Gibeonites had undesignedly given the people of God a precious opportunity for teaching, not merely by wordy protestations, but by the practical and weighty testimony of a solemn international compact, that they acknowledged on their own part, and claimed from others, the duty of being upright and sincere in all transactions. The principle was the same which above nine hundred years later, was taught in the message of God by Zechariah viii. 16. "These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord."

Several ages after what was recorded by Moses concerning Amalek, and by Joshua, concerning the Gibeonites, Saul imperfectly and evasively, executed the doom of Amalek (see Exodus xvii. 8-14; 1 Samuel xv. 2-11), and afterwards sought to destroy the Gibeonites. To do this was not only not commanded, but was a flagrant and cruel breach of an international contract. In both cases Saul, by his presumptuous deviations from divine directions, sought to please the people. The life of one man, Joshua, comprised the divine charge to wage endless war with Amalek, and the oath to spare the Gibeonites. Both were in regard to Saul's duty, binding obligations. Saul was charged to fulfil the sentence against Amalek, which he partly evaded; and he transgressed further also by *violating the oath* which protected the Gibeonites.

In both instances, as before-mentioned, Saul sought to please the people. In sparing part of the spoils of Amalek, he gratified the people's covetousness. In persecuting the Gibeonites, he had similar motives. The

Gibeonites were in possession of lands and cities, which they held by the title of the ancient league, ratified by the sanction of an oath; which the princes of Israel in the time of Joshua held sacred. But the increased numbers and possessions of Israel since Joshua's time had stimulated that covetousness of the people, which early broke forth in murmurs against the princes, when their first hasty agreement with the Gibeonites had precluded the greedy crowd from dividing the spoils of Gibeon and its cities. The lands and cities of Gibeon were still more valuable in Saul's time; and eyed by his subjects with an evil covetousness, which made the oath, which guarded those possessions, seem a hateful limitation to the rapacious desires of Israel. Saul knew the disposition of his people, and, to please them, oppressed the Gibeonites with sanguinary violence, making it perilous for them to remain in any of the coasts of Israel. 2 Samuel xxi. 5. And on the side of their oppressor there "was power, but they had no comforter." Ecclesiastes iv. 1. Yet they had an all-seeing, watchful, and awful avenger. For after so long a time, the same Lord who first commanded war with Amalek, and in whose name Joshua and the princes had sworn to the Gibeonites, four hundred and twelve years after the conflict with Amalek at Rephidim, *remembered Amalek*; and nearly four hundred years—372—after the oath of the princes, *remembered Gibeon*, and punished the breach of the solemn treaty which bound Israel to spare it.

The wrongs and sufferings of the Gibeonites having been thus pleaded by the divine remembrance and advocate, they were called upon to say what they would accept as a compensation for their national injuries. The Gibeonites, says this record, "were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah. Wherefore

David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement that ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord? 2 Samuel xxi. 1-3. After disclaiming any wish to compound their injuries for money, "they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, *the chosen of the Lord.*" [Margin.] "And the king said, I will give them." But for a reason like that which should have restrained Saul from violence against the Gibeonites, the *oath* that, from the time of Joshua, guarded them and their possessions, David spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, his friend, "because of the *Lord's oath* that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. But the king took the two sons of Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, and the five sons of Michal (or, rather, Mirab), the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholahite; and he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill *before the Lord*; and they fell all seven together; and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days in the beginning of barley harvest."

After this severe public act, in vindication of the outraged rights of a subject people, whose forefathers in the time of Joshua, *depended on being secured by the oath of the princes of Israel*, and whose oppressors now found that the oath which they had daringly violated was enforced with divine judgments by the sleepless and resistless providence of Him to whom oaths appeal; Rizpah, whom the exacted penalty had made childless, waited for the result of it *as an atonement*, in a manner and with a devotedness, which will be memorable through all time. She "took sackcloth,

or rather haircloth, of which tents were commonly made, and spread it for her, as a tent to dwell in; being informed that their bodies were not to be taken away speedily, as the course of the law was in ordinary cases, but were to continue there until God was intreated, and removed the present judgment. She spread it in some convenient place, on a rock, near adjoining, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night." "Until water dropped upon them out of heaven." "Then, it seems, they were taken down, which was not to be done till God had given rain as a sign of his favour, a means to remove the famine which was caused by the want of it,—of rain." Some supposed she waited till the autumnal rains—a period of about five months. Of course it is to be presumed from her rank and position, that Rizpah had the assistance of servants in these severe and exhausting efforts of maternal tenderness.

Having been informed of Rizpah's remarkable conduct, David, characteristically humane and generous, was moved to strong sympathy with her parental devotion, hastened to relieve her painful and unsparing labours, and to honour the remains of the dead by a public burial.

## II. The LESSONS.

These events exemplify

Incessant vigilance and unfailing remembrance on the part of divine providence :—

The reality of divine government over men and nations :—

The enduring obligation of oaths between nations as well as individuals.

Four hundred years, with the manifold changes of persons in so long a time, made no change in the doom of Amalek, or in the sacred treaty rights of Gibeon. From generation to generation, even down to the time of queen

Esther, of Ahasuerus and Haman, *wrath* was upon Amalek; and the Lord, requiring the treaty with Gibeon to be faithfully observed, punished the breach of it; first, by the famine on the people of Israel generally, as being at least conniving parties; and then on Saul's house in particular, as being guilty leaders in acts of oppression.

The sacred obligation of justice and equity in the sight of God, who "requireth that which is past," especially in engagements made in His name. If "in the place of righteousness, iniquity is there,"—"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked."—Eccles. iii. 16, 17.

The vanity of the world was impressively manifested by the overwhelming reverse that had come upon the favourite of Saul, and the mother of two of his sons, afterwards the favourite of Abner, made childless and desolate by the stroke of a divine sentence on the oppressors of Gibeon.

The conduct of Rizpah had probably been evil in her days of influence and prosperity. She was perhaps a partaker of the spoils of Gibeon, if not an adviser and instigator of the injuries they suffered.

In these events we see Rizpah enduring severe retribution. She had been thirty-five years a widow, and was compelled to learn still further the sad lessons of adversity. When she had nothing left but sorrow for the dead, and tenderness for their remains; which she watched and guarded, day and night, until "water dropped upon them out of heaven;" heroically resolute and persistent in her grief and care; she appears most amiable in her lowest and most afflicted state.

This pathetic and indestructible record of her sorrowful perseverance, is not merely a personal anecdote of an individual, but a token that what is so touching to the reader now, was precious in the sight of the Lord.

He whose awful justice is displayed in these events is still true and faithful.

He still requires truth and equity—he will fulfil his threatenings as well as his promises.

He whose word thus preserves to all generations the memory of a mother's tenderness, declares that *His* love is stronger than that of a mother.—Isaiah xlix. 15.

Had not Rizpah, as well as David, faith to believe that as God had required a public retribution for the wrongs inflicted on the Gibeonites, a satisfaction which comprised the death of her two sons; so *He* would signify His acceptance of it as an atonement by giving rain to remove the famine; and did not she watch and wait *in believing expectation of rain*, as well as in maternal feeling for the remains of her sons? and may we not hope that where there was faith, there may have been a penitent and sorrowful conviction of the divine *justice* of the providential visitations by which the Gibeonites were avenged? The sure mercies of David were not then fully displayed, but they even then existed; and if this sorrowing mother had the broken spirit which, with a contrite heart, is declared a sacrifice God will not despise, her ever memorable grief and care may have been something better than that "sorrow of the world which worketh death."

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## DAVID'S LAMENTATION FOR ABSALOM.

“And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!”—2 SAM. xviii. 33.

IN all history, there are few characters so remarkable and interesting as David. His powerful talents and exquisite accomplishments; his bravery and his piety; his transgressions and his repentance; his sacred songs,—the undecaying monuments of inspired genius;—and the wonderful vicissitude of his successes, dangers, and divine deliverances, alternately affect a reader of sensibility with delight and distress, with admiration and compassion, with solemn satisfaction and holy indignation, with all the charms of a surprising yet natural variety. It may perhaps be not difficult to name persons who, in some characteristic trait, or in some solitary achievement, were more eminent; but we shall rarely contemplate one distinguished by so many shining qualities; placed in so many singular and trying situations; and displaying, through almost every part of a long and active life, so fine a union of the amiable and the glorious virtues.

His being anointed in youth, as the future King of Israel, would give new vigour to a spirit naturally enterprising; by teaching him to rely in all just undertakings upon the protection of that irresistible Providence whose designs were so plainly signified. When he became the Lord's anointed, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him; prompting him, as it did Samson and other avengers of Israel, to works of faith which, for the boldness in attempting and the might in performing them, were deeds of astonishment. He seems to have possessed an ardour

that delighted to surmount difficulties and to face dangers, with a capacity equal to the attainment of whatever is within the reach of human effort.

While thus richly endowed with those hardy powers of mind which give promise of temporal greatness, he was not less gifted with the sensibility which seeks and makes friends, and at once refines and increases every social enjoyment. In almost every stage of his pilgrimage, his situation and conduct bespeak the favour of the reader. When we have made some progress in his history, we feel that we have insensibly become the friends of David; that kindness as well as curiosity, quickens our attention to the events of his life, and the unfoldings of his character.

He is at first set before us as a generous youth, of prepossessing appearance, with a vigorous frame, and an elevated mind. Even then he began to attract observation by pleasing tokens of future eminence. His fine susceptibility had begun to show itself in his skill upon the harp; to which he probably sung the poetry of his early psalms; for in the infancy of nations, music and song were seldom divided. If austere minds demand, why such things are mentioned in a sermon, it may be sufficient to reply, that David's eminence in these delightful arts is honourably recorded in a history written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. His skilful mastery of the complex task of a minstrel must appear to have been wonderfully excellent, when it is considered, that he was selected from the mass of his countrymen, to endeavour, by the gentle power of melody, to calm and soothe the gloomy frenzy of king Saul; and that, though the disturbance and melancholy of Saul's mind had a preternatural cause, yet in many instances, when "David took an harp, and played with his hand, Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him."

About the same time, we behold him the vigilant

shepherd of his father's flock; defending the lambs from the most formidable beasts of prey, and acknowledging God as his deliverer from the lion and the bear. In the same spirit, the courage of faith, he stands forth as the champion of Israel against Goliath; and returns from the mighty enterprise in favour with God and man. Afterwards we see him the chief hero of his time; celebrated not only for personal valour, but for skill and success as a commander. We then see his talents and virtues more severely tried by scenes of danger and perplexity; when, with a handful of men, he was constrained to wander as a vagabond, by the causeless jealousy of his unhappy king. In these difficult circumstances, we see his princely character rendered more illustrious by adversity: we observe his fidelity to an unjust master, and his clemency to a defenceless enemy; and we perceive his ascendancy over the minds of men, by his success in forming a respectable army from the followers of his exile; discontented and turbulent spirits, who, under an inferior leader, would have become fierce and licentious plunderers.

At length, after many preparatory trials had proved and disciplined his vigorous mind, he ascended the throne, as the hope of his nation, and the Lord's anointed. We then behold him subduing or overawing the hostile states around him; by the blessing of God on his wise and firm government, raising his kingdom to great power and glory among the nations of the East; and preparing for his successor a reign of peaceful grandeur. In short, we see him as a son, dutiful; as a shepherd, faithful; as a soldier, brave; as a subject, loyal; as an exile, magnanimous; as a general, skilful and victorious; as a king, politic, enterprising, and magnificent; as a man, uniting fervent, humble piety with great mental superiority, and with the finest genius for the elegant arts.

As a friend also, and as a relative, his personal character

sometimes appears in such a manner, that strong hold is taken of our natural sympathy, before our judgment can examine and decide. The occasional breaking forth of his kind and generous emotions spreads over all his great qualities an affecting gracefulness; showing in one example, the sublime, the pathetic, and the beautiful, not impaired, but made more interesting by their intimate combination. As a warrior and king, as a prophet and poet, he stands above the men of his day like Saul among the people; and in some of these lines of excellence is still peculiar and unequalled; in these respects, however, his competitors could not be numerous; but as a friend and relative he surpasses the multitude in what is common to mankind. His friendship with Jonathan, the most celebrated in history, is a delightful part of his life and character. His lamentation for Saul and Jonathan is the first and finest instance on record of a poetical tribute to departed greatness. And his lamentation over Absalom is one of the most natural and affecting manifestations of the mental anguish of a religious parent, whose child had died in his sins.

It may be useful

I. To consider this memorable lamentation, in connexion with the causes which occasioned it; and

II. To point out some of the practical lessons which are suggested by the whole subject.

First, it is proposed to consider David's lamentation for Absalom, in connexion with the series of causes which occasioned it.

The mere death of Absalom is not sufficient to account for the extraordinary grief of his father. The manner of Amnon's death had been terrible; and the distress of David on that occasion was complicated and severe; but his grief was then restrained within ordinary bounds. It may therefore be inferred that, if the death of Absalom

had not been presented to David's mind in connexion with circumstances more dreadful than attended the loss of Amnon, his feelings would not have been so intolerable and overpowering. The loss of Absalom was but one link of a long chain, the iron of which entered into David's soul.

The general survey which we have taken of David's character is pleasing. It is honourable to our nature, that a man ever existed in whom so many excellences were associated. But in tracing the remote causes of his violent grief, we are led to melancholy scenes, to deeds of dark secrecy and "blood-guiltiness," (Psalm li. 14;) in which David, once the man after God's own heart; David the wise, the pious, the noble, the humane, appears debased and degraded, shorn of his strength; filled with the weakness, and covered with the shame, of guilt. During a season of luxurious indolence, while his generals and armies were active in a dangerous war, David became involved and entangled in a labyrinth of crimes, which ensnared his soul, brought upon him the most awful calamities, and hung over his unborn posterity the fearful denunciation, that the sword should not depart from his house for ever. After contemplating the glorious tenor of his former life, it is distressing to read of Bathsheba and Uriah.

As these iniquitous transactions are now noticed only on account of their distant connexion with the text, we need not minutely investigate them. They were the causes of this awful speech of the prophet Nathan, after his parable of the ewe-lamb, and after David had pronounced an indignant and severe sentence against the supposed criminal: "Thou art the man! Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that

had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Amnon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house: because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour." Though, upon David's immediate submission and deep repentance, the Lord put away his sin, and promised that *he* should not be put to death for his crime; yet the dreadful inheritance which was entailed upon the long line of his descendants, and the threatened domestic afflictions which were mysteriously impending in his own time, must have pressed heavily upon his heart, and caused unspeakable agonies of secret remorse.

As his first great crimes arose out of a state of improper indulgence, so the punishment of them seems to have been partly derived from a similar source: the voluptuousness which led him into crimes prepared the instruments of his chastisement. Disregarding the divine charge to kings, David had taken many wives; and though the prevailing manners of the time and country might excuse this conduct in the opinion of his subjects, it was not the less a violation of the law of God, and an invasion of the equitable rights of one half of the human race; and the consequence was confusion and mutual slaughter among his children and relatives.

With the number of wives he had taken, it was scarcely possible for him to have a well-regulated family; nor was it likely that his children should have the same pure fraternal affection for each other, as if they had been born

of the same mother, and brought up under her immediate care. If the wives in such a family did not live apart,—each having a distinct residence, or a peculiar set of apartments in the palace,—they would be still more divided and put asunder in a common dwelling by the numerous and inevitable vexations and jealousies of such a household. Similar division and distraction would prevail amongst the children of different mothers. Instead of one harmonious family, there would virtually be as many families as mothers; and occasions of discord would be perpetually occurring. Under the constant blighting influence of such circumstances, that delicate and measured affection with which brethren and sisters generally regard each other, could scarcely grow up in strength and purity. This pernicious and unscriptural frame of David's house furnished a probable concurrent cause of Amnon's unlawful attachment to his half-sister Tamar. Those who have read the Scriptures with attention are acquainted with the shameful sequel.

The same corrupt and mischievous constitution of the royal household which occasioned a part of Amnon's temptation, would have no less tendency to stir up Absalom to revenge. Tamar and Absalom were born of the same mother; and while the children of different mothers would stand aloof from each other, as rivals or enemies; those who had one mother would be more likely to feel one interest and to combine against the rest of the family. And whether this view of the accessary and predisposing causes be admitted or disputed, the event in this case was, that Absalom procured the murder of Amnon, and fled to his maternal grandfather, Talmai, king of Geshur. Thus began the stern fulfilment of the prediction that God would raise up evil against David out of his own house: Tamar was disgraced,—Amnon murdered,—Absalom a criminal in exile.

After David had suffered this complicated calamity, it was five years before Absalom again saw his face. It would seem that during this interval, Chileab, the next elder brother after Amnon, had died; for, as soon as the restraint of David's displeasure was removed, we find Absalom assuming the airs, and practising the arts of an ambitious and discontented heir-apparent. Perhaps his mortal enmity to Amnon was sharpened by the consideration, that his own unprincipled ambition could not succeed while Amnon was alive. Revenge for the violent and licentious injury to his sister might be the plausible pretence, while the great actuating purpose was the destruction of a rival. Absalom seems to have had a strong bias towards cunning and desperate villainy. Against Amnon, for two full years, he cherished, in silent subtlety, the smouldering fire of resentment; and waited, with unrelenting perseverance, for a convenient opportunity to strike effectually the long premeditated blow. Towards David he acted with equal dissimulation, till he had fomented and organised an extensive conspiracy: then he openly seized the throne, and aimed at the life of his father; and, by his foul and unnatural treason, astonished every honest mind in Israel.

Apparently deserted by the majority of his deluded subjects, and in danger of his life from this wicked son, David fled with a few faithful adherents; and thus suddenly returned, for a season, to that state of perilous wandering in which he had endured and achieved so much in the time of Saul. On the day of his hasty retreat in dejection and alarm from Jerusalem, he was brutally reviled by Shimei, a wealthy partisan of the house of Saul; but being at this time in a penitent and devout state of mind, David bore these insults with exemplary patience, and restrained the indignation of those who would instantly have sacrificed the reviler.



He had already received the discouraging intelligence that his chief counsellor, Ahithophel, had joined the conspirators; and, as David well knew, so he justly dreaded, Ahithophel's consummate policy. That sagacious traitor advised Absalom to embolden and consolidate his party, and to shut out all hesitation and compromise, by committing against his father such extreme and shameful injuries as no father would be expected to forgive. This diabolical expedient was calculated to encourage Absalom's followers to stand by *him*, by showing him irrevocably bound to stand by *them*. Ahithophel was well qualified to comprehend the cold and selfish views of those who would say, "A rebellious son may make good terms for *himself*, in case of need, by abandoning *us* to his father's vengeance." And Absalom was easily persuaded to purchase the unprincipled support of such adherents, and to qualify for their base suffrages, by displaying himself as one whom no ties could bind against his apparent interest, as a stranger to all natural affections and repugnancies, as a reckless transgressor of the divine precepts, who could trample on domestic as well as political morality, in the headlong pursuit of his desires. But this atrocious policy would cut both ways. The strength it gained by making bad men bold in favour of Absalom's rebellion, would be overbalanced by its driving all the good, with all the invincible energy of religious fortitude, to the support of David as the Lord's anointed. And though Absalom's enterprise could not be begun, nor even premeditated, but in deliberate opposition to the known will of God; it was the very madness of folly to defy divine providence by publicly laying the foundations of the usurped throne in acts which, by divine direction, had been declared accursed on Mount Ebal, with the solemn "Amen" of the whole Israelitish nation.

On the same day, Ahithophel proposed an immediate

and decisive measure, which, if it had been instantly adopted, with suitable vigour of execution, must have been highly dangerous to David, and, but for divine interference, might have proved fatal. “Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night : and I will come upon him while he is weary and weak-handed, and will make him afraid : and all the people that are with him shall flee ; and I will smite the king only : and I will bring back all the people unto thee : the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned : so all the people shall be in peace.” There were no just means by which such an enterprise as that of Absalom’s could be promoted ; and there can be no doubt that the course proposed by Ahithophel was the most politic that could be pursued in so bad a cause. But though Absalom, with his followers, applauded this bold and skilful advice, he was inclined by some unmentioned motive, to desire the opinion of Hushai, his apparent partisan, but David’s secret friend, who was forthwith invited to the council. Being requested to give his judgment of the proposed expedition, Hushai instantly perceived with alarm the deep, clear, and formidable sagacity of Ahithophel’s impetuous system. He saw as well as Ahithophel, that, while to gain time by wise delay. is the great resource of endangered authority, to accelerate a crisis by energetic rapidity is the true prudence of revolt after the sword is drawn. With astonishing promptitude and dexterity, he urged the most plausible objections against the advice which was so horribly judicious ; and, with equal art, proposed and recommended a different set of measures, so contrived as to be for David’s interest, but so skilfully misrepresented as to appear, to Absalom and his council, more safe and effectual for their cause than the plan of Ahithophel. The counsel of Hushai indirectly flattered Absalom’s vanity, though it did no honour to his

penetration. He had the mean talents which sufficed to steal the hearts of the multitude; but he wanted the intelligent mastery to wield so vast an instrument. The same vicious weakness which made him pant to seize his father's grandeur, was weakly pleased with the suggested "pride, pomp, and circumstance" of a numerous grand army to be commanded by himself in person. Thus the prompt expedition of Ahithophel was discountenanced; and the only opportunity for striking a sudden and fatal blow was for ever lost. "For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom."

According to the approved (but insidious) counsel of Hushai, Absalom waited till the men of Israel could be generally assembled; and then, making his cousin Amasa chief captain, he put his army in motion, and went in quest of his father. In the mean time, Hushai sent immediate intelligence to David of the measures which had been debated, and of the course which Absalom had determined to adopt. And lest Absalom should again incline to Ahithophel's vigorous counsel; lest the infatuation should pass away by which, as Hushai saw, Absalom and his council were blinded to the real imprudence and danger of the seeming cautious and sure system he had recommended to them; Hushai urgently advised David to quit the plains of the wilderness, where an enemy strong in numbers would have the full advantage of that superiority. Accordingly, in a few hours after Absalom's counsellors had been speaking, and before that night had ended in which Ahithophel proposed to finish the war, David and his faithful band passed the Jordan: and by placing the broad and deep river between himself and Absalom, gained time to retrieve the spirit, and increase the number, of his men; to calm the sudden terror, and direct the zealous aid, of his loyal subjects; and to choose some position where a small body

of veterans might act with advantage against a numerous army.

His conduct, at this critical period, showed the skill of a great commander, the magnanimity of a wise king, and the heart of an affectionate father. He selected the ground for the impending conflict; he arrayed troops inured to perils, accustomed to victory, and eager for action, under leaders of tried ability; and sent them out with this charge, "Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man, even with Absalom." From this, it is evident, the experienced warrior firmly anticipated success; while the father's heart yearned over his foolish child. At this time David blamed himself more than he did Absalom. He who said, some days before, that God had bidden Shimei curse, would and no doubt did, consider that, if he had not provoked God "to raise up evil against him out of his own house," divine providence and grace would have restrained Absalom.

The event justified his reliance on divine providence, on a just cause, and on a compact army of disciplined heroes, skilfully disposed under great commanders, against an irregular multitude, who were fighting the battle of wickedness. "The battle was in the wood of Ephraim;" a very proper situation for a small army, "where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men. For the battle was there, scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured." The embarrassment the wood occasioned to Absalom's tumultuous myriads, was a more extensive and effectual cause of their destruction, than the swords of David's men.

But David was disappointed in his earnest desire that his son's life might be spared. In the helpless confusion of his routed army, "Absalom met the servants of David.

And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away. And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak." Joab was a brave soldier; a most resolute and able chieftain; a great man in an age of great men: one who, besides his general vigour and capacity, had a deep, latent energy, to be drawn forth when occasion should require; and such consummate self-command, that, amidst the fiery rage and bitter triumphs of civil war, he had always the cool quickness to discern the moment when enough was done for victory, and when, by sound of trumpet, he might recall the pursuers from useless slaughter. But his life was wicked, and his heart intensely selfish. He probably thought David's charge in favour of his parricidal son, an instance of foolish and dangerous tenderness. Perhaps, too, as Joab had mainly promoted Absalom's return from Geshur, and his subsequent restoration to favour, he might feel strong displeasure against him, for having made so vile a use of those good offices. Or Joab's calculation might be, that if Absalom survived his defeat, he would be forgiven by the indulgent father who had so anxiously commended him to the forbearance of his great captains; that, ultimately Absalom forgiven might survive and succeed his father; in which case those who had crushed his rebellion would have every thing to dread from his revengeful temper. And Joab appears to have been determined that, whoever was king, he would be chief captain; and therefore, that the violent prince, whom he had conquered in a great battle, should not live to dispose of high command as David's successor. On this principle his sudden and effectual violence against Abner, Absalom, and Amasa, and his rash league with Adonijah, are accounted for. What-

ever motives swayed him in this crisis, his resolution was soon taken. After the man who told him of Absalom's defenceless situation had replied with honest warmth against the suggestion, that he should have slain the king's son, Joab said, "I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak. And ten young men that bore Joab's armour compassed about, and smote Absalom, and slew him." They added such wounds "as would have killed him had he been alive."

Two swift footmen were then dispatched to David, with news of the victory. One of them had with difficulty obtained Joab's leave to run on this errand, and appears to have been actuated by motives of considerate kindness to the anxious king and father. For he contrived, partly by taking a better road, to outrun his fellow, and delivered his message with such reserve, that, while he assured David of the overthrow of his enemies, he left him prepared by suspense to hear of Absalom's death. As soon as he came within hearing, he shouted the brief and full annunciation, "All is well!" When he arrived he fell down before the king, with his face to the earth, and said, (like a good man, as David had just before described him,) "Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king." David eagerly enquired, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Ahimaaz answered evasively, that he saw a great tumult, when Joab sent him and Cushie, but knew not the cause. Soon afterwards, Cushie arrived, to whom Joab had said, "Go tell the king what thou hast seen." He approached, calling as he ran, "Tidings, my lord the king: for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee." To him also the king said, and probably with increased perturbation, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" And Cushie answered, like a courtier, with smooth and delicate

circumlocution, "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." Then with admirable simplicity, the historian says, "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" It is added, that "the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son." David had gained a battle, but he had lost a child. He had quelled a great rebellion, and apparently finished a civil war; but by the terrible light of Nathan's prophecy, he saw before him an indefinite remainder of judicial requitals for his sin against Uriah,—a lengthening prospect of future calamities, which would temporally visit the iniquities of the father upon the children. And those who wondered at his grief, as extravagant and unaccountable, knew not how intimately the awful end of Absalom was associated in David's mind with the bitter remembrance of his own great sins, and with the inevitable, intolerable reflection, how different the whole case of the son might have been if the father had kept himself unstained with uncleanness and innocent blood. If at one season of alluring temptation, he had only turned away his eyes and his mind, and renewed his strength by waiting upon God, what a dreadful series of crimes and miseries had been prevented! But he had sown the wind, and was reaping the whirlwind! For that time, to all appearance, David had secured his crown; but for ever, to all appearance, Absalom had lost his soul!

II. It was proposed, in the second place, to point out some of the practical lessons which are suggested by the whole subject.

1. The event which David lamented came upon him as a part of a series of strict and terrible divine retributions.

David himself acknowledged the punitive character of some of the preceding disorders, when he said of Shimei, "Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it?" Which implies, not that David supposed God to have commanded Shimei to curse; but that he viewed the insolence of the Benjamite, and the more grievous violences in his family and kingdom, as permitted consequences of a judicial withholding of that protecting, efficacious, invisible control, which had previously guarded his children, and chained his enemies. How many heavy calamities did Providence bring upon him as the avowed punishment of his sin against Uriah! How fully was the threatening verified, "I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house!" And his own sentence on the supposed criminal accused in Nathan's parable was executed, with one exception in favour of his own life, which the prophet made at the time. Nathan left the other parts of David's own decree unrepealed. David had promptly decided that the rich man should restore fourfold; and four of his own sons were taken away by awful and untimely deaths. His first child by Bathsheba was stricken by the unseen hand of God; Amnon by Absalom; Absalom by Joab; Adonijah by Benaiah, at the command of Solomon. Through a monstrous "evil raised up against him out of his own house," he became a distressed wanderer in his own dominions; exposed to hunger and weariness; surrounded by the snares of treachery; perplexed and harassed with anxieties and suspicions; while his kingdom was distracted and convulsed, and the foundations of his throne were shaken. His sins, with his judgment in the case presented in Nathan's parable, and the dreadful harvest of troubles which followed, furnish a striking exemplification of that law of divine retribution afterwards declared by David's Son and Lord: "For with



what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matthew vii. 2. He had dishonoured Uriah, and was himself dishonoured tenfold; with an aggravation which the prophecy threatened: "For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." "I will do," is an expression which evidently cannot be taken literally; for *God* did not *do* it, though the event took place; nor did He compel the doing of it; He foresaw what the counsel of Ahithophel and the conduct of Absalom would be, if not hindered; and was as just towards those hardened sinners in suffering them to work part of their wicked will, as He was towards David in permitting them to avenge Uriah, by deeds which they perpetrated with other views; and as He is at all times in not preventing *all* the evil that sinners are inclined to commit. David had practised deceit and baseness against Uriah; deceit and baseness were practised against himself: by Amnon, Ahithophel, and Absalom, he was deceived to his hurt, in the most egregious manner; and their returns for his confiding kindness displayed the lowest depth of baseness. He had contrived to commit murder by the sword of strangers; and by the hands of his own relatives the innocent blood was avenged. His own person was mercifully passed over; but for the life of Uriah four of his sons were slain, all his posterity threatened, and the threatening fulfilled from age to age in the dreadful massacres of his descendants. Witness Jehoram's murder of his six brethren; the slaughter of all Jehoram's elder children by a predatory band of Arabians, with forty-two of his male relations, by the hand and orders of Jehu; the destruction of all the seed royal except Joash, by Athaliah; the assassination of Joash, Amaziah, and Amon, by conspirators; the mortal wound of Josiah in battle; the slaying of Zedekiah's sons before his eyes; with the

Roman proscription of all the known descendants of David. In these retributions, who does not see, "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over!" May a due consideration of them dispose us to stand in awe of this revealed rule of divine providence, "*With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again!*"

2. These deep sorrows of David exemplify the malignant energy of sin in destroying temporal happiness, even when divine mercy averts the penalty of wrath to come. After laying open the subtle and guilty precautions, by which David sought to conceal his first crime, the sacred historian says, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." He had used dark and desperate means to screen himself from human censure. The brave and honest Hittite, who must soon have become aware of the hateful injury he had received, was silenced by death; and the manner of removing him was so dexterously planned as to appear accidental; the stratagem was so refined that the plausible artifice concealed itself. Even if David had been in a less exalted station, his adultery could hardly have been prosecuted to conviction in a human court; because Uriah, who had the chief right of prosecution, had fallen by the weapons of the Ammonites; and the first wanton injury was rendered dubious, even as a matter of rumour, because some steps had been taken to make the child of Bathsheba be supposed the offspring of Uriah. Uriah's death did not *appear* to be *murder*, and there would have been extreme difficulty in proving, by human means, that he was murdered, or that David was his murderer. The only witness who could have proved the crime, and confronted the criminal, was the wicked tool and accomplice, Joab, who was bound by his own interest to be discreetly silent. Bathsheba had gone through the customary form of mourning as a widow. "And when the

mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife." Appearances were thus saved. That Uriah had fallen in battle, would not seem extraordinary to those who, at the gates of Rabbah, were ignorant of any secret orders from Jerusalem; nor would the news of his death excite wonder at Jerusalem; being reported, along with the fall of some of his fellow soldiers in the same conflict, as part of the general tidings of war. And the king's having married Uriah's beautiful widow, would be more likely to bring censure on Bathsheba than on David, as long as their previous intercourse was unsuspected. Thus was this dark affair covered with a most specious and finished mask, and spread over with the colours of decency to meet the public eye. But all this vigilant and politic management was unavailing to prevent the temporal wretchedness, personal, domestic, and public, which was the natural fruit of David's sin. The adulterer said, "No eye shall see me;" but there was the all-penetrating eye of Him, to whom the royal Psalmist sung, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me." "Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." Psalm cxxxix. 7, etc. "The thing that David had done displeased" Him, whose "eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness or shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." Job xxxiv. 21, 22. From this time, David's temporal happiness was gone. An interval of guilty care and awful impenitence was followed by a season of intense remorse. During these two periods, the light of his soul was overcast with shadows, clouds, and thick darkness. And when he returned to the fear of the Lord, he was taught that,

“because by this deed,” secret as he thought it, he had “given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme,” therefore the displeasure of the Holy One of Israel must be manifested by visible and severe chastisements. The death of Bathsheba’s infant was but the first, and the sudden and hopeless destruction of Absalom was but the heaviest, of many dreadful strokes, in which David felt the scourge of God. The sin, and shame, and misery of his children, which pierced his heart with sorrow upon sorrow, were so mysteriously linked with the remembrance of his own fall, as to be so many sharp arrows to his conscience ; renewing again and again with new pangs and sores, the anguish of his wounded spirit. Such terrible connexion had his sorrows with his conscience, when he cried, “Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son !” Many calculate, in the hour of gay delusion, that they may first sin like David, and then, like him, repent and be forgiven. Let them only weigh his transient and troubled pleasure, with the lasting remorse, the shame, the perplexity, which followed ; and with the guilt and ruin of Amnon and Absalom, the troubles of his kingdom, his doomed posterity, his stinging consciousness that all these envenomed evils had their source in his own sin ; and then let the tempted count the cost of imitating his sin, even if they could also ensure the remedy of grace to imitate his repentance.

3. David’s grief for Absalom drew much of its bitterness from his own faults as a parent. His character as a father has lights and shadows. That he felt all the tenderness and strength of paternal affections, is evident from the text, and from other portions of his history. It is also apparent that he understood and acknowledged, and in some instances practised, the religious duties which belong to the head of a family. His written resolves were, “I

will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." And some parts of his household practice were right. From one passage in his life, it appears that his acts of worship were not limited to the public services of the tabernacle, and the sacred solitude of the closet, but were also introduced into domestic life, and formed part of his home engagements. After he had been attending at the head of his people, upon the joyful solemnity of bringing the ark into Jerusalem, it is said that "he returned to bless his house;" the obvious meaning of which is, that he went home to pray for and with his family. But there are other circumstances which betray too great indulgence to his children. When Tamar expostulated with Amnon, she reasoned on the supposition that his father could scarcely refuse him anything. By the want of such just visitation of Amnon's offence, as a king and father might have administered, Absalom was left in possession of a strong pretence for private revenge; and was taught, when plotting the destruction of Amnon, to hope that, like him, he should come off easily, if he could avoid the first effects of his father's displeasure. And the permission Absalom received to return, after a short exile, without any greater punishment than a temporary exclusion from his father's court and presence, was too likely to confirm his arrogant and licentious presumption that, as the king's son, he was above law. And after all David's bitter experience of the fruits of blind indulgence, it is written concerning his next son Adonijah, that "his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" The natural affection of parents should, indeed, be manifested, as well

as felt; but so manifested as to appear always under the control of conscience. Parents should restrain the depraved inclinations of their children, from infancy upwards; making due allowance for mere childishness, but firmly repressing the beginnings of bad habits, and never conniving at sin. Those who connive, either from selfish indolence or weak fondness, may find a terrible re-action from their accusing conscience, when, in some season of severe bereavement, they reap the fruits of parental unfaithfulness, like him who cried, "Would God, I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

4. It is easy to perceive that David's great sins as a man were the causes, in part, of his occasionally weak and bad government as a father and king, which had so calamitous a result in the case of Absalom. After recording Amnon's abominable conduct, the sacred history says, "But when David heard all these things, he was very wroth." And perhaps his first thought was, that, though the transgressor was his own first-born son, the presumptuous sin should be visited with some sharp and exemplary punishment. But his second thought would probably be, Is it for thee to chastise youthful licentiousness? Art not thou (the father of many princes, the husband of many wives) an adulterer? When his surviving sons returned, after the assassination of Amnon and the flight of Absalom, "they lifted up their voice and wept: and the king also and all his servants wept very sore." Had Absalom failed in his attempt to escape, and been suddenly brought a prisoner to his father, in the midst of this sore weeping, the first emotion of David, as of all around him, might have been indignation against the murderer; and his first word, a cry for justice on the audacious criminal. But how could he have punished Absalom without first hearing him? And if he had heard him, though the guilty prince might not have dared to recriminate, the

conscience of the king and father must have spoken inwardly, pleading, Why was the punishment of Amnon left to the rash hand of Tamar's brother? And when was the murderer of Uriah brought to justice? It was hardly necessary for Absalom to have fled to Geshur. In any station, the commission of sin is like the scattering of sparks, or the letting out of waters. When the deed is done, who can trace its latest consequences? Had David kept himself from injuring Uriah, Amnon would probably have stood in awe of his father's pure character: Absalom would then have had neither provocation nor pretext to slay his brother; and, being saved from that crime, would not have been emboldened by impunity, till, cut off as a rebel by the hand of Joab, he was lamented by his father in bitter words, that will speak David's parental misery to the end of time. Had the first link of this endless chain been withholden, had David checked his wandering heart, what a complicated series of crimes and agonies would have been prevented! Sin in high stations is like the loosening of snow-wreaths on high mountains; where, the shaking having once commenced on some cloud-capt eminence, the inevitable avalanches roll down, with accumulating magnitude and accelerated velocity, till the thundering and flying ruin falls with irresistible weight on the valleys below.

5. The immediate cause of David's violent sorrow, was an instance of the swift and sure punishment of filial impiety. The first commandment with promise, as recited in Deuteronomy, says, "Honour thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." "We may therefore conclude," says a learned commentator (Dr. Adam Clarke), "that it will go ill with the disobedient; and there is no doubt, that the untimely

deaths of many young persons were the judicial consequences of their disobedience to their parents." Other wise persons have thought, that the promise implies a corresponding threatening. In Absalom's case, this principle of judicial providence was fearfully displayed. The punishment of the rebellious son overtook his unfinished crime. The father whose throne he seized, and whose life he pursued, longed to receive him to mercy; but divine justice permitted Joab to intercept the proposed clemency; and Absalom was driven beyond all human jurisdiction, even into the presence of the Judge Eternal, as one taken in his sin, "in the very act."

6. The death of Absalom spoke unutterable things to David on the awfulness of dying in sin. Recourse must be had to very bold conjecture, concerning supposed penitential changes in Absalom's mind, while he hung alive in the tree, before we can obtain a shadow of hope relating to his everlasting state. A few hardened profligates have appeared hopefully softened at their last hour; some have even given credible signs of conversion; but those who have been allured, by the great prizes of ambition, into the dark and crooked ways of that insidious policy which counts enormous injustice among its calculated means, have generally died as they lived: and though some of them have been driven by remorse to superstitious austerities, they have still, by holding fast the fruits of sin, betrayed the unsoundness of their seeming repentance. There is not one fact in Absalom's history which can encourage us to class his dreadful end with the happy exceptions. Had he sought mercy with all his heart, even at the last tremendous hour, the promise would not have been broken, which says, "But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart, and with all thy soul." But where is the evidence, or the ground of probable inference, that



he would or did so seek the Lord? The hopelessness of his case arises, not from any impossibility of mercy being extended to so great a sinner, but from the utter improbability of his having sought mercy, as a true penitent, with all his heart. After having attained a premature ripeness of guilt; after a life of aggravated, presumptuous, and unnatural wickedness, he was "suddenly destroyed, and that," apparently, "without remedy." We see nothing like true repentance in his life; and after such a course of daring impiety, the sorrows which overwhelmed him when hopelessly entangled in the tree, were likely to be such as rebellious angels feel. "Happy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart, shall fall into mischief." Absalom might perhaps be one of those fools, described by his inspired father, who have said in their hearts, "There is no God;" or, if there is, He "hath forgotten; He hideth His face; He will never see it." If such were his vain thoughts, how miserably did his presumption deceive him! The invisible Avenger, whom he set at nought, permitted him to be stricken, as a wicked man, "in the open sight of others." Or perhaps the destroyer suggested to him, as to thousands, that he might enjoy the splendid gains of guilty ambition, through the prime of life; and avoid the wrath to come, by a penitent old age. If such were the representations which determined him, how bitterly was he tantalized by the father of lies! He had a mountain of guilt, without its gains; and his monstrous life was cut short by a horrible death, without either old age or repentance. Could we have seen the graceful prince, who had no blemish from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, and who was "praised for beauty" above all the youth of Israel; could we have seen his countenance when his flight was intercepted by the servants of David, when his mule left him dreadfully suspended betwixt heaven and earth, and when Joab,

approaching with three darts in his hand, aimed the mortal thrust at his heart; we should have seen the perfection of beauty violently transformed into the express image of terror and despair. If ever there have been moments that, by the rapidity and intensity of dreadful thoughts, at once glancing through the guilty past and the boundless future, have seemed to involve a concentrated infinitude of misery; such were the last moments of Absalom. What a reckoning, what new pangs, what hideous prospects, might await his departing soul, are among the secrets of that hidden world which the living cannot penetrate.

But while we are thinking and speaking of Absalom, he is still existing. For nearly three thousand years the beautiful body which Joab pierced has decayed in the dust; but the surviving spirit of Absalom, in some part of the creation of God, is now present; conscious, intelligent, full of undying remembrances, and incessant anticipations. If he gave up the ghost in a state of impenitent despair, such has his state been, seeking rest, but finding none; while successive empires have been gradually founded and strengthened, enlarged and adorned, weakened and wasted. While mighty Babylon was rising, and Nineveh was ruining; while mightier Rome was training its iron people, trying different forms of government, shattering the sceptres of rival nations, extending its sway over the fairest countries of three continents, prescribing limits to its own vast ambition, and at length seeking unsafe repose under the shadow of its hoary grandeur, till it became a new Babylon amidst ruins, under the name of the Eternal City; during all those slow revolutions of ages, while the silent, daily touches of time have been crumbling temples and exhausting life, through the succession of a hundred generations, the lost spirit of Absalom has been living on. While the children's children of Absalom's armed multitude have been scattered over the earth, as outcast, wan-

dering, suffering•Jews; the spirit of the prince, who stole the hearts of their fathers, and led them in rash rebellion, has never slumbered, nor been quiet, nor tasted oblivion. If, as is apparent, "the wicked" was "driven away in his wickedness," such, without hope, he remains; still waiting without hope, until the pale and bloody corse, which was buried beneath a heap of stones in the wood of Ephraim, shall be made to stand up, with Amnon and Ahithophel, with Joab and his men, before the great white throne, at the summons of the last trumpet.

7 Well might the godly father cry, "Would God, I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" These expressions would have been weak and foolish, had he felt only the blind sorrow of a worldly parent. But, in this instance, natural grief was rendered more intense by the light and love of the spiritual man. It is no substantial objection against a life of faith, that, in this world, like many other sources of enlarged knowledge and refined sensibility, it increases some of our painful feelings. Had David's own heart been dark and impenitent, he might have felt less grief and horror at Absalom's being cut off in a headlong course of presumptuous sin: but the actual case of Absalom must have remained the same, if his father had been insensible or heedless of his ruin. David doubtless thought of his son's soul, when he exclaimed that, if it had pleased God to order it so, he would have died to save Absalom alive. He wished his wicked son to have had time and means to repent. Though but a disciple of Moses, David's mild and humble behaviour, during the vexations of this dangerous and harassing revolt, had been such as we might expect from a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus. At that time, he could have walked through the valley of the shadow of death, and feared no evil. Had he died, he would have had hope in death; but in Absalom's death, he saw no hope!

You who *are* religious parents, can comprehend David's feelings, and sympathize with his sorrow. What can afflict a pious mind with so sore a wound, as the sudden death of a wicked child? O ye Christian parents, lay these things to heart! Strive while you may, for the salvation of your children. Let not your faith concerning their salvation, be a faith without works. Let them not only hear your prayers, and warnings, and counsels, and affectionate exhortations; but let them also behold in your conduct, a pervading, paramount concern for their spiritual and eternal welfare; a holy affection which dreads their hazard of inward contamination; a judgment which "esteems all" God's "precepts, concerning all things," to be right; a rectified will which, without wavering, prefers even want and reproach, with a good conscience, to all the transitory enjoyments of a worldly mind; and steadily pursues the interests of the soul and of eternity, before all the delights of the body, and all the vanities and blandishments of things temporal.

And you, who *have* godly parents, consider these things. You may die before them. Bereaved by a sudden stroke, they may follow you, with heavy hearts, to your early grave. Would you have them tortured with hopeless anguish, through the fear of your having died in your sins? *You* may perhaps see *them* die: embitter not their last moments. Let them not go hence with an awful presentiment of eternal separation from their impenitent children. If you recoil from the supposition that your Christian parents should either depart full of fears for you, or survive you without hope in your death, consider that even their interest in your salvation is but secondary. You have the first and deepest interest in your own everlasting well-being. Love your own souls. Be your own friends. Stand afar off from the paths of seducing temptation. Seek and serve Him, who is still, as in the days of

David and Absalom, a holy and a jealous God, who "judgeth the righteous," but "is angry with the wicked every day." "Hell and destruction are before" Him; "how much more then the hearts of the children of men!" His "hand shall find out all" His "enemies;" His "right hand shall find out those that hate" Him. He "shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of "His anger: the Lord shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them." But His gracious will is, in these better days of David's Son and Lord, that sinners repent; that penitents came to Christ, believing with their hearts unto righteousness; that believers walk in the light of faith, and in the ways of humble, joyful, loving obedience. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men; teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

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## JEHOSHAPHAT REPROVED ;

OR THE POSSIBLE MISCHIEF OF GOOD MEN'S INCONSISTENCIES.

“And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God.”  
—2 CHRONICLES xix. 1, 2, 3.

In the history of various nations, there have been bright ages, distinguished and glorious times, when great events and great men have been produced in clusters or constellations.

Among the ancient Greeks, there were the successive splendours of the ages of Themistocles, Pericles, and Demosthenes. Among the Romans, there was the Augustine age, illustrated by the celebrated names of Pompey and Cæsar, Cicero and Virgil. In modern Europe, there was the latter part of the fifteenth and the commencement of the following century, the age of Columbus and Luther, illustrated by a host of men of learning, genius and enterprise, too many to be enumerated; a period in which four of the greatest events of modern history were nearly simultaneous; the invention of printing, the revival of learning, the discovery of the western world, and the Reformation. In France, the age of Louis the fourteenth, was, in some respects, highly distinguished. In England, the times of Elizabeth, Anne, and the last one hundred years, are those to which the greatest names of our country belong.

In the times of God's ancient people, there were some periods marked by the numbers and influence of men

eminently great and good ; with dreary intervals of general wickedness, meanness, weakness and misery.

Before the Law there was the venerable succession of Holy Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job.

The first shining period under the Law, includes the times of Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb, and the elders who outlived them.

The next was the long and bright day of Samuel, David and Solomon, comprising nearly two hundred years,—the best in the Jewish history.

The best periods in about four hundred years following, from the death of Solomon to the captivity, are those of Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah.

After the captivity there were two remarkable and superior ages,—that of Ezra and Nehemiah, and that of the Maccabean brothers.

The last and best day of the second temple was the time of the Fore-runner, the Saviour, and the Apostles.

Each of these great landmarks of time in the sacred history was made glorious by the talents, virtues, and usefulness of worthies whom God raised up, and whom His Spirit ennobled and animated,—men who honoured God above all, and whom He has delighted to honour, by placing their names in His everlasting word, like stars in the sparkling firmament.

The times of good *Josiah* were continued into those of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The age of *Hezekiah* was that of the prophets Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, and Isaiah. The contemporaries of Jehoshaphat were the prophets Hanani, Jehu, Jahaziel, and Eliezer, in his own kingdom ; and Micaiah, Elijah and Elisha, in the kingdom of the ten tribes ; with the faithful priest Jehoiada, and other men of renown in affairs of state, of war, and of religion, whose names are recorded in the sacred books.

One thing which is remarkable in these books,—is the unsparing impartiality, with which the faults and mistakes of the best men are stated. Jehoshaphat himself is set before us in the text as being reproved and threatened for grievous inconsistency.

It is generally admitted, that real and prevailing goodness of heart and life, may exist along with a proportion of errors and inconsistencies.

Individual cases are sometimes judged with harsh severity; but too large an allowance for infirmities is often made both by the church and the world, especially in estimating the extent and force of their own moral obligations. Their views of unavoidable infirmity and of the mercy extended to it, lead to this dangerous mistake—that the Gospel is looked upon as a diluted or mitigated law.

But neither worldly nor serious men are, on the whole, sufficiently awake to the fact,—that the general sincerity of an inconsistent good man, does not disarm his practical errors of their natural powers of mischief.

Those causes or means of evil which his neglect or unfaithfulness allows to be put in motion and set to work, will move on like a discharged missile, or work on like leaven, regardless of his after thoughts, his better wishes, or his untimely regrets.

Through a long succession, through a continuous chain of effects, independent of his wishes or his remorse, they will exert an influence, according to their own nature, according to the circumstances and dispositions amidst which they operate.

The eye of a feeble or unskilful archer, may follow his arrow in its flight, as if he could still choose or change, or accelerate its course; but the shaft which has left the string obeys that impulse alone, which it received at the instant of its departure, heedless of the suspended breath,



the eager looks, or the vain regrets of him who still holds the bow.

A good man's inconsiderate mistakes, or temporary and transient unfaithfulness, may even sometimes be as hurtful as a wicked man's deliberate malignity; being strengthened for efficiency in evil, by the good of his general character. It is a plain instance of this—that if a man esteemed for his wisdom and integrity, should, through misapprehension or inadvertance, give an inaccurate and injurious account of the conduct of any person; the consequent stain on that person's reputation will be more deep, extensive and lasting, through the high character of him who made the wrong statement.

Perhaps there is not a more likely means to put good men on their guard against unhappy inconsistencies—than by laying open the case of an eminent saint, whose infirmities and occasional mistakes struck deep root in the affairs and interests of his family and kingdom, and of the church of God, and brought forth fruit and seed according to their evil nature, in the face of the world, and through a wide range of time and space. The mischief of a bad man's smaller faults passes almost unnoticed amidst the mightier evils caused by his great sins; while the faults of a good man, and their bitter consequences stand out distinguishable in contrast with his general excellence.

The preceding chapter states that on occasion of a visit which Jehoshaphat made to Ahab in Samaria, Ahab persuaded Jehoshaphat to accompany him to battle at Ramoth Gilead. There Ahab received his death-wound, and the first verse of this chapter states that "Jehoshaphat returned to his house in peace at Jerusalem."

Then the history goes on saying, "And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer, went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee

from before the Lord. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God."

This impressive passage leads us to consider

I. The mixed character and inconsistent conduct of Jehoshaphat ;

II. The consequent mixture of judgment and mercy in the dealings of God with him ;

III. The practical instruction suggested by his history.

1. In his character and government there was much that was decidedly and enigmatically good.

(1.) His public and exemplary *adherence* to the lawful worship and service of God, and his general piety and integrity, are tacitly *implied* by the reproach, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate me?" They are distinctly *recorded* in the sacred history in several places. 1 Kings xxii. 43. "And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord: nevertheless the high places were not taken away; for the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places." 2 Kings iii. 14. "And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee." 2 Chronicles xvii. 3-6. "And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim," etc. His *son was reproached* by Elijah for acting contrary to his good example. 2 Chronicles xxi. 12-15. "And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring,

like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: Behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great sickness of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of thy sickness day by day."

(2.) His *zeal* as a reformer of abuses and corruptions in religion, and his sincerity or *heartiness* in seeking God, are *expressly* commended by the prophet in the latter part of the text.

(3.) His *habitual acknowledgment of God*, in matters of hazard or perplexity, appears incidentally from his conduct relative to the expedition to Ramoth Gilead, in the country of Moab, and when his country was invaded, (2 Kings iii. 11,) "Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him?" 2 Chronicles xx. 3, 4. "And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah, they came to seek the Lord."

(4.) His *humility* and *child-like obedience*, under divine rebuke, appear by his conduct after this message of God had been delivered to him, and by his refusal to renew his joint naval enterprise (after God had destroyed his vessels by a storm) when solicited to do so by the king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Ahab.

(5.) His *judgment, vigour, and integrity as a ruler* appear from several parts of his history. His goodness was not that of a *weak*, good man. Early in his reign he made and executed the most judicious, practical arrangements for the public security, and the moral and religious instruction of his people in all the cities of his kingdom. (See xvii. 7, 9.) But his care and zeal for religion were not, like the devo-

tions of superstitious or enthusiastic princes, connected with neglect and imprudence in his administration of government. While his religious reforms were in progress he prepared treasures for public purposes, built cities and fortresses, and greatly increased the numbers and the orderly equipment and discipline of his army. It is remarkable that his army or militia was twice as numerous as those of Asa his father. Asa had 580,000 enrolled soldiers in his armies; Jehoshaphat, one million one hundred and sixty thousand. And at the period of his reign to which the text belongs, he followed up his quiet and silent submission to Divine rebuke, by the most prudent and earnest measures to avert the threatened inflictions, and to ensure more fully the strict execution of justice, and the promotion of true religion. He not only commissioned and instructed proper agents to judge his subjects in every province, but he also made a progress in person through his kingdom to enforce and sanction the faithfulness of his officers, and directed the people to proper courts of appeal for final decision in cases of difficulty.

2. But in some things he acted mistakenly, inconsistently and sinfully. Sincere religion was the RULE; the faults which are mentioned are EXCEPTIONS.

(1.) There seems to be no way of accounting for his making peace, any further than the suspension and cessation of hostilities with the kingdom of the ten tribes, and his forming a family alliance with Ahab, but by supposing him to have acted on a *miscalculating worldly policy*.

When Jehoshaphat came to the throne, the two kingdoms had been separated about sixty years. There would be old men living who remembered the peaceful grandeur of the undivided kingdom of twelve tribes in the glorious reign of Solomon. The evils which accompanied and followed the partition would be justly deplored by the wise and good; and statesmen who looked more to human means

and ends than to Divine dispensations, might willingly or inadvertently forget that when Rehoboam had gathered an army of one hundred and eighty thousand chosen warriors to recover his authority over the revolted tribes, the word of God came to him by Shemaiah the prophet, saying, "*Thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren; return every man to his house: for this thing is done of me.*"—It seems most probable that the apparent desirableness of a reunion of the two kingdoms perverted the judgment of Jehoshaphat and his councillors on two important and essential questions: first, whether God would approve the *end*;—and second whether the *means* proposed were lawful or safe.—The marriage of Jehoshaphat's eldest son to the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel was apparently designed to lead, *first* to a cementing of peace by a family compact, and afterwards to a possible union of the influence and the rights of the two royal families in *one heir*; who in a generation or two might peaceably inherit both kingdoms.

Jehoshaphat thus entered into temptation himself; and set a dangerous snare for his family and people. He did evil that good might come—but evil came in terrific abundance.

(2.) This great and culpable error led to all the rest,—his going with Ahab to Ramoth Gilead, and the danger he incurred there, from which he only escaped by divine mercy; for the "Lord helped him, and God moved them (the Syrians) to depart from him."

(3.) After the great deliverance from the Ammonites recorded in chapter xx., his easy temper, and bad connexions led him to a commercial enterprise jointly with Ahaziah, which was ungrateful and presumptuous; and after all to a military enterprise with Jehoram the son of Ahab in the land of Moab. 2 Kings iii. 6, 7. "And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time and numbered

all Israel. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses."

II. The consequent mixture of judgment and mercy in God's dealings with Jehoshaphat.

1. God chastised him *as a son* with signal severity.

Partly during his life, by stirring up the Moabites and others to *invade* his kingdom, when Jehoshaphat felt and acknowledged that his numerous militia was insufficient without divine protection.

Partly by destroying his *navy*, after threatening to do so, on account of his connexion with the wicked son of Ahab.

Partly by involving him in danger of *thirst*, etc., in Moab.

God visited Jehoshaphat's sin, after his death, partly by permitting *Jehoram* to kill his brethren, and the *Philistines* and *Arabians* to destroy Jehoram's elder children.

Partly by permitting Jehu to destroy Ahaziah and his kinsmen. See 2 Kings ix. and x. chapters.

Partly by Athaliah's massacre of all the seed royal. 2 Chronicles xxii. 10. On the whole, *by utterly disappointing* the false policy with which Jehoshaphat had sought to strengthen his family and dynasty by worldly alliances, his posterity, in consequence of his erring policy and bad connexions, was reduced at one time, about seven years after his death, to two persons, Jehosheba the wife of Jehoiada, and Joash, then an infant, the only surviving male after four massacres. The event sought by the affinity with wicked Ahab, took place in part—one *heir* to the two houses—but God had appointed another dynasty to displace that of Ahab—Jehu and his posterity reigned by divine right. Thus the anticipated series of *means* took place, but the *end* was frustrated.

2. But God was merciful to Jehoshaphat himself, He heard his prayer, and mightily delivered him and his kingdom from the Moabites. He sent prophets to rebuke him when he erred, and protected him to the end of his days, so that in peace he was gathered to his fathers. The weightiest judgments fell on his descendants.

III. Jehoshaphat's history teaches us

1. That, with right principle and general faithfulness, as the chief elements of character, there may be some strange inconsistencies as occasional exceptions. But the offences of those who are *on the whole sincere* will be chastised.

2. That, without a faithful and watchful use of the light and strength of grace, great mischiefs may flow from an *easy temper*, which is commonly called a happy disposition. Such a person, however unlikely or unwilling to contrive or originate evil, may be extensively involved as a partaker of *other men's sins*, or as the tool of bad men.

3. That, very complicated and serious, though unexpected, mischiefs may arise from good men's acting with worldly policy, instead of religious prudence—mischiefs which follow in natural course, not as accidents, but as the proper fruits of the seed sown.

4. That, great beyond calculation, is the sin, and folly, and danger of forming *bad connexions*, especially in marriage.

Sin—in treachery, disloyalty and double-dealing towards God. “Shouldest *thou* help the ungodly, and *love* them that hate me?” The friendship of the world is spiritual adultery in the sight of God.

Folly—in incurring clashing obligations—binding them to love them that hate the Lord. In miscalculating results—vainly hoping against revealed truth and duty, and against all probability.

Danger—Great beyond calculation as to the possible influence on the religious person who forms the ungodly connexion—a whole system of temptations voluntarily incurred, and not to be shaken off.

2. Danger very great and certain as to the training of children. A matter of serious difficulty even when both parties are wise and good. A difficulty almost insurmountable when *one* is ungodly.

3. Unspeakably dangerous to posterity. In Jehoshaphat's case—a succession of horrible massacres—in many similar cases the results are like the horrors of French tragedy, behind the scenes—in the unseen world the murder of souls.

5. That, if the *errors of good men* are so dangerous and so severely visited; the deliberate and habitual sins of the *worldly men*, against whom they are warned, will fall still heavier on their authors. How great the danger, how terrible the results, when sin is the *rule* and good the *exception*! “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

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## JEHOIADA.

“But Jehoiada waxed old, and was full of days when he died; a hundred and thirty years old was he when he died. And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God and toward his house.—2 Chronicles xxiv, 15, 16.

THE faithful high priest and wise ruler, whose lengthened course and honourable end are here briefly mentioned, filled a much larger space in the mind's eye of the prophets and statesmen of Judea, from his own time downwards, than he occupies in the thoughts of modern readers. The extended notice of his conduct and character in the sacred history, as well as the momentous influence of the events in which he was a willing and selected instrument of divine providence, may indicate to us what share of our thoughtful attention his life and times deserve. He and his pre-eminent contemporaries, Elijah and Elisha, were the chief lights of his long day. His sacred office and his personal eminence combined to render him, above all others in the kingdom of Judah, *the man for the times*: the man who had the influence, the integrity, and the sagacious energy to change the times in which he was called to act, to stem and to turn the stream of circumstances and events, and to secure, for the people of God and the chosen nation, a long respite from enormous public evils which, before Jehoiada began to breast the current, had broke in with a wide inundation.

His personal history, connected as it is with the history of the Jewish nation and church in his day, illustrates and exemplifies various principles both of human and divine conduct, and is for that reason, perhaps, among others, distinctly and impressively recorded.

It may be instructive and useful to consider—

I. The general view which the text presents of the long life, the religious zeal, and the honourable end of Jehoiada.

II. The principles implied or suggested by such a record in the book of God.

I. The general view, etc.

1. It is much more than a mere fragment or circumstance of personal history which the text gives in the former part of it—Jehoiada waxed old, etc., one hundred and thirty years, etc. It is but natural and reasonable that the information at what age he died, should lead our thoughts to trace his long course back to its starting point, to survey the times in which his youth was passed, and during which his character was forming.

From a careful examination and comparison of what is stated in this book concerning the time of the several reigns, from Rehoboam down to Joash, it will appear that this patriarchal priest and true patriot, Jehoiada, was about *five years* old at the death of Solomon, and that he lived through the times of Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, and twenty-eight years of the reign of Joash.

Jehoiada was the grandson of that Ahimaaz (the son of Zadok the priest), who was one of the messengers to warn David to pass over Jordan, lest the politic and diabolical counsel of Ahithophel should be acted upon; and who, after the defeat and death of Absalom, obtained leave from Joab to carry tidings to David, and by outrunning the other messenger gained the opportunity of giving David the first news of victory over his enemies, while he left him in suspense as to the death of Absalom. In 1 Chronicles vi. 4, the successive high priests are mentioned, Zadok, Ahimaaz, Azarian, Johanan (which seems to be another form of the name of Jehoiada), and Azariah, who was high priest in the time of Uzziah (the grandson

of Joash), and resisted that king's presumptuous attempt to burn incense in the temple.

During the youth of Jehoiada, the most eminent of this glorious line, the memory of Solomon's grandeur, and of the power and prosperity of the undivided kingdom of the twelve tribes, was still fresh in the minds of all Israelites of ripe years. When Jehoiada was of the age of twenty-one, the temple had been finished about forty years; and, except the treasures, and the shields of gold, which Shishak, the Egyptian conqueror took away, that glorious sanctuary retained its magnificence unimpaired. The conversation of his older friends would abound with recollections and regrets respecting the glories and the errors of Solomon's reign; his fathers officiated as the priests of the Lord amidst the solemn splendours of that house of prayer. They had been present when the ark was placed under the outspread wings of the cherubim, and when on their coming "out of the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord." Such remembrances in the conversation of his elders, and such supernatural, sacred grandeur in that "holy and beautiful house," where his fathers served as high priests, would combine with the direct instruction of these venerable men, to place him in most favourable circumstances for the right training of his mind and heart. Jehoiada was a young man, when Rehoboam, taught by divine chastisements, was governing comparatively well. He was about twenty-five years old, when king Asa began his good and prosperous reign of forty-one years. Thus the former part of his life, the time when his habits of thought and principles of action would be commenced and gradually settled, was passed in a time of wise and good government and religious influence. Truth and righteousness had then a long ascendancy, and

the blessed social and national results were constantly under his eye in obvious connexion with their moral causes. Under the pious reign of good Jehoshaphat, till the nineteenth year of Jehoiada's age, the same causes were still producing similar effects. The earlier and larger part of this great and good man's long life, was thus passed amidst scenes and events most auspicious for the formation of his personal character, by observation and reflection, and the silent power of long habit. As a thoughtful and religious observer, he was in a situation to receive numerous weighty and lasting impressions of the close practical connexion of true religion with good government and national happiness.

When Jehoiada was about ninety years old, a great change began, the bitter fruit of what, years before, a worldly-wise policy had unwittingly sown. The twelve years from the death of Jehoshaphat to the accession of Joash were dark with crimes and calamities, with wicked government and national misery. The events of that shameful and disastrous period, displayed as through storms and lightnings, with startling contrast, and dazzling illustration, the same great, general laws of providence, the same constant and unfailing sequence of moral causes and effects, which, in the better times of Jehoshaphat and Asa, were presented to the contemplation of observers like Jehoiada, as in calm and clear sunlight.

In the person of Athaliah (who to her husband Jehoram, and her son Ahaziah, was their counsellor to do wickedly), the house of Ahab, for twelve sad and gloomy years, was seated *beside* or *upon* the throne of David. During that fierce domination of the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, the people of Jerusalem were compelled, *made* to build the high places of idols, and enticed to worship them. State murders were multiplied for the security of guilty power, and divine providence delivered up the house and treasures

of Jehoram to bands of foreign plunderers, who repaid the slaughter of his seven brethren upon his own family, slaying all his sons but the youngest. The death of *that* son, Ahaziah, in the first year of his reign, with forty-two of his male relations (and one of his brethren) by the orders of Jehu, and the murder of the remaining members of the seed royal of the house of Judah, by Athaliah, followed, in gloomy, but apparently natural succession. The slaughter of princes had become a common event. And by the revolting sins and the frightful, prolific evils of that hateful and baneful ascendancy of the house of Ahab in the kingdom of Judah, the connexion of wicked government with national decay and wide-spread misery was awfully exemplified.

“Athaliah had long been the virtual possessor of the supreme power in Judah,” as the wife of Jehoram, and the mother of Ahaziah. But, her son, being cut off, “she disdained a precarious and indirect authority, and would reign alone. Her spirit was perhaps at this time rendered *unusually savage* by the sanguinary proceedings of Jehu,” at Jezreel and Samaria, against the family to which she herself belonged, and in which she had lost at one outburst of wrath, her mother Jezebel, her brother Jehoram, her son Ahaziah, with seventy other male descendants of Ahab. It would seem to her very probable that the sort of authority exercised by personal influence—*first* as queen-consort, and *then* as queen-mother, was in very great danger. It was likely that whoever of her grandsons might succeed to the throne, he would prefer the counsels and guidance of his own mother; and that his own mother would not willingly allow Athaliah to continue to retain her accustomed influence. Here then, in addition to the extravagant rage of a wicked mind, on account of the slaughter of her relatives at Jezreel and Samaria, there were two powerful motives,—either of them all-prevalent

with an ambitious woman,—dread of losing her own power, and intolerable jealousy of being superseded *by another woman*. Thus probably she was spurred on, by her own vehement passions, to the atrocious resolution of destroying all the children of *her own son*, Ahaziah. Perhaps there was a third motive,—a desperate resolve that the house of Ahab should not fall alone—that the house of David should be involved in the same wreck and ruin. And in executing that dreadful determination, she unwittingly “fulfilled a part of the mission against the house of Ahab, (see 2 Kings ix. 8,) a part which Jehu could not execute;” for through herself the taint of Ahab’s blood had been introduced into the family of Jehoshaphat, and she with her children and children’s children, were included in the prophetic doom, that God would take away Ahab’s posterity by the sword. The murder of Joash himself, forty-six years after the massacres by Jehu and Athaliah, and of his son Amaziah, twenty-nine years later by the sword of assassins, completed the accomplishment of the sentence against the males of Ahab’s house. “The Lord would not destroy the house of David (2 Chronicles xxi. 7) as he promised to give a light to him and his sons for ever”—but in the persons of Joash and Amaziah the doom was accomplished to the third and fourth generation, which was also a fulfilment of the general denunciation in the second commandment;—that God will visit the iniquity of idolatrous fathers upon their children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him. Joash was the third, and Amaziah the fourth from Ahab;—both of them, after ruling well for a season, relapsed into idolatry; and thus by their personal guilt, became additionally liable to the treasured arrears of wrath, as descendants of Ahab and Jezebel.

Three successive dynasties, of wicked kings of the ten tribes, rose and fell in the time of Jehoiada;—that of

Jeroboam, which ruled twenty-four years,—that of Baasha, twenty-six years,—that of Omri, forty-six years. When the power of the house of Ahab began, by the accession of Omri, his father, Jehoiada was about fifty-six years old. He was contemporary with, and probably observed with intelligent and conscientious alarm, the beginning of that ruinous policy of Jehoshaphat which sought security for the throne and family of David, and perhaps recovery of lost dominion in the union of both kingdoms, by affinity with that able and wicked Ahab, who added the worship of Baal to the sins of Jeroboam, “and did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all the kings of Israel that were before him.” At the death of Athaliah, Jehoiada being then one hundred and two years old, saw the issue of that erring policy. He then saw the once powerful and dangerous house of Ahab reduced to one descendant, of seven years old; and only preserved from complete extinction, by its connexion with that house of David, which, by an ungodly alliance with Ahab and Jezebel, had been dragged to the brink of destruction.

Such were the times in which Jehoiada had passed about a century of his long life; times which, from an early age he had doubtless intensely observed; belonging as he did to a family, in rank and influence, only second to the house of David, and in which ignorance or indifference in reference to such a series of events was scarcely possible. Yet during nearly one hundred years of his life we read nothing of him. He had probably spent many years in the high priesthood. While regular and official duties were his proper work and providential calling, he kept in his station, as a faithful man, being no ambitious meddler in affairs of state, but quietly and vigilantly attentive to the claims of duty. But had he been a thoughtless and indifferent observer, he would have been old without experience,—remembering much, but destitute of wisdom,

—and unfit for counsel or action at the season of urgent need and precious opportunity. Had he lived on *without observation*, his high station and venerable age would have ill qualified him to *do good in Israel* in such times. Had he been a *mere observer*, however attentive and thoughtful, however full of treasured recollections, however wise to reflect and to judge, we should but have found his name slightly mentioned amongst the genealogies, and the sacred history would not have paused to state how long he lived, or where he was buried.

2. But at one hundred and two years he comes forth openly as a man of action,—of sagacious, intrepid, influential decision— as a leading character—a ruler of the people—a champion for the truth and the right,—who by a series of well-considered, extraordinary, daring, and effectual acts of duty, in a time of frightful emergency, earns the praise that “he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house.” Long before he planned and executed the bold enterprise which delivered the throne, the temple, and the people, by the death of the murderess, Athaliah, he must have been acting with steadfast and courageous fidelity in his office as high priest. Two or three of the eight years of Jehoram’s reign, were in the lifetime of his father Jehoshaphat; and the last two were after the plunder of his treasures, the captivity of his wives, and the death of all his elder sons, and during the incurable disease with which the Lord visited him according to the prophetic writing of Elijah, 2 Chronicles xxi. 12-15. “And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, But hast walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain



thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself; Behold with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods; And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day." It must therefore have been within the three or four years (from the death of Jehoshaphat to the slaughter of Jehoram's sons) that what is mentioned xxiv. 7, took place, "For the sons Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord did they bestow upon Baalim." These things must have passed at a period ending nine years before the death of Athaliah.

During at least twelve years, commencing when Jehoram slew his seven brethren, the power and influence of a violent and unscrupulous court were exerted to promote idolatry and to discourage the worship of the Lord. But it appears probable from xxiii. 8, that through all the confusion of these dreadful times, Jehoiada kept up the regular attendance of the priests and Levites by weekly courses. The temple had been despoiled of its precious dedicated things, to enrich and adorn the houses of Baalim; and the house of God had been broken up; but amidst the treachery and deficiencies caused by wanton spoliation, the faithful servants of God continued their stated duties, even after the most frightful manifestations of tyrannical rage. Had the constancy of Jehoiada and those who served under him, been less uniform, he would not have had that continuous possession and custody of the temple, which enabled the infant Joash to be withdrawn from amongst Ahaziah's sons when they were slain, and to be *hid* with Jehoiada and Jehosheba *in the house of God six years, while Athaliah reigned over the land.* Had Jehoiada at any time wavered, had he forsaken the plundered and delapidated temple, he would have been without

opportunity to interpose unobserved; and had he not persevered in the worst of times in requiring the regular attendance by courses, the Priests and Levites would not have been at hand without remark or suspicion, when their presence in double numbers was wanted to effect the downfall of the usurper and the deliverance of Judah. 2 Chronicles xxiv. 14. "And they offered burnt offerings continually all the days of Jehoiada."

Keeping firm hold of the vantage ground afforded by quiet and regular perseverance in his holy duties, Jehoiada doubtless waited and watched, with careful and discerning notice, the course of events and the temper of the people. The terrific excess of such violence as Athaliah had exerted to seize the sovereign power, would for a time have a stunning and disheartening effect on the people generally. But in the course of years, the ordinary government of a wicked woman, becomes loathsome and contemptible, especially when destitute of the shadow of right, and upheld by mere force and terror. In six years the terrors of Athaliah's power, unconnected as it was with any constitutional and lawful support, would abate; and men would grow ashamed, and indignant against themselves for submitting to be oppressed by such a monster. Many would be thus prepared to co-operate in any reasonable and promising scheme for her destruction. Jehoiada waited for this change in the minds of men. It is evident that Jehoiada acted with consummate judgment; consulted but a short time before the crisis of action with a few well-disposed commanders, whom he satisfied, that an heir of David, the son of Ahaziah, yet survived; and having shown him to them, bound them with an oath. The despised temple, unfrequented by the adherents of the usurper, still afforded shelter to the infant king, and was an unexpected mustering ground for his deliverers. By detaining that body of Priests and Levites that should have gone out by course

on the Sabbath, which could be done without giving any of them previous notice; and by adding to these the men of five captains of hundreds, whose chiefs alone were in the secret; and with them chiefs of the fathers of Israel; a force was simultaneously brought together, from various cities of Judah; and without stir or tumult, or display of arms, was assembled at one time in the temple. Their several posts of duty being assigned them, they were furnished with weapons from the armoury of David, in the house of God. Then was the young king brought forth, and crowned amidst his armed defenders; and a lawful government, under a rightful monarch, was thus restored, before a blow was struck or a life taken. They were sounds of loyal triumph, acclamations of public joy, not of conflict, that reached the ears of Athaliah; and care was taken that the temple which she entered in her alarm, as an alien and an enemy, should not be stained with her blood; but she was slain beside the royal palace. 2 Kings xi. 17. "And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people that they should be the Lord's people." 2 Chronicles xxiii. 17-21. "Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and brake it down, and brake his altars and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars," etc.

Thus after the worshippers of Baal had accustomed the people to hear of violence and massacre, a great and happy reformation was effected at the cost of two guilty lives; Athaliah and Mattan being great criminals against that law which was at once divine and national; and a foundation was laid for further peaceful triumphs of truth and righteousness.

After these things Jehoiada survived twenty-eight years, being fourteen years after king Joash attained maturity, and seventeen years after he was of the age

at which Solomon begun his reign, with a manly ripeness of judgment.

The faithfulness of the aged patriarch was manifested by his so instructing Joash, and his own sons Zechariah and Azariah—that Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days, wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him; and his sons proved worthy of such a father, Zechariah being a faithful witness against idolatry even to martyrdom; and Azariah being he who withstood king Uzziah, when he intruded into the temple to burn incense.

We find Joash at one time reproaching Jehoiada for dilatory management as to the repairs of the temple; a circumstance which one commentator interprets as implying a want of active zeal. But in all the eventful history of the Jewish monarchies, we shall find no more striking instance of high-principled and sagacious decision than in his first recorded acts; and from the first appointment of the Levitical priesthood to the royal priesthood of the Maccabees or Asmonean princes, no high priest appears so eminent in his station, so remarkable in his personal influence over the course of events, so powerful in his life, or so honoured at his death.

3. “They buried him in the city of David among the kings.” At the time of his death, all concurred in the desire to give special honour to the instrument of so many benefits. The people had dwelt in peace under his shadow; the king who owed to him his life and throne, had not yet learned to be basely ungrateful. He who some years afterwards (ten, according to chronology of the margin of the Oxford Bible; so long it required to overcome *good* habits in a king and people who had no deep principle of religion) commanded that his cousin and faithful reprov-  
er, Zechariah, should be stoned “in the court of the house of

the Lord ;” and who, by a divine retribution, was first plundered by the Syrians, and then slain by his own servants, and excluded at his burial from the sepulchres of the kings;—he united with his people in burying Jehoiada “in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house.”

II. Principles implied or suggested by this record of Jehoiada.

1. The honour rendered to him in the manner of his interment was intended to signify and express what the text records—the reverent and grateful approbation of the faithfulness, zeal and fortitude of Jehoiada in the cause of the nation and of true religion, on the part of the people and nation who had been benefited by his virtues.

A different course of action, a plausible and showy self-aggrandisement, may impose on the multitude for a time, and obtain a transient popularity; but the benevolent enterprise which devotes and hazards self for the public good, and employs success with conscientious faithfulness, commands thoughtful and sincere veneration.

2. The honour that comes from God is added, by the tacit confirmation of the national estimate of Jehoiada’s worth, in this inspired history. His name and virtues are fixed in the everlasting word like stars in the firmament, and have a secured, world-wide renown to the end of time.

3. The plain lesson that we should do our duty in that state of life whereunto it hath pleased God to call us. “A few men manage the world as instruments of Providence.”

4. A greater than Jehoiada has devoted himself to the benevolent, self-sacrificing enterprise of our salvation. He was before all things—and from the foundation of the world it was his purpose to sanctify himself—to devote

himself—as a sacrifice to be offered in the fulness of time. During thousands of years he waited like Jehoiada the fitting opportunity; but with a higher purpose, amidst greater danger, and with a perfect foresight which transcended Jehoiada's provident arrangements—and then came forth as the worker of miracles, the preacher of righteousness, and the Royal High Priest of our profession, to secure the throne of David and the salvation of his people.

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## BARUCH.

### AMBITION FORBIDDEN TO GODLY MEN.

“And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.”—JEREMIAH xlv. 5.

FOR our guidance and encouragement in reading the scriptures of the Old Testament, the Apostle Paul states that, “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; (Romans xv. 4.) that “the things which happened to the Israelites, were” for ensamples; and “are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come:” implying that they are for the instruction of those who live under the Gospel and kingdom of Christ; that last dispensation of grace which will continue to the end of time. In applying the principle of the Apostle’s statement, I have been led to regard this message from God, to Baruch the scribe, as breathing a spirit of warning to the people of God, everywhere and always, against that great branch of wordliness—*Ambition*. It suggests weighty reasons why spiritually-minded persons should unreservedly forego and renounce ambitious views. Against this application of the passage, doubts and objections have sometimes been urged; but the reconsideration thus called for has resulted in a settled conviction that the injunction—“Seek them not,” is not to be regarded merely as a fragment of Baruch’s personal history, nor as being limited to his case. The Lord condescendingly gave reasons why Baruch should not seek great things for himself; reasons which, in effect, allege a principle, as the ground of his prescribed duty;—the principle, namely, that his case, with its necessities and dangers, was specially regarded and provided for, amidst great purposes

of Providence concerning his country and people; that as he had a divine assurance of his personal safety, amidst great and general calamities, his heart should be closed against all selfish desires for great things; that retaining a heaven-protected life, amidst the scenes of death and ruin with which he was, or would be, surrounded, he ought humbly and thankfully to prize it as a sufficient distinction and favour to be so divinely guarded. And our sober and learned expositor, Benson, treats the precept as not limited to Baruch's individual case, but as extensively applicable. "Dost thou aspire to honour, dignity and prosperity, or expect to be exempted from adversity and trouble, in a time of great and common calamity? *'Seek them not.'*—Never think of any thing of the kind."

Baruch was admonished to moderate his desires, because he had a special pledge of providential care and goodness. The principle of this caution to him is of great importance, and of extensive and permanent application. It is therefore recorded for the general guidance and comfort of the people of God. Each and every true believer in Him, to whom "all power is given in heaven and in earth," is placed under a divine safeguard. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them."

But great blessings bring with them great duties. "Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not." Thus the special privilege and security promised to Baruch, brought with it a caution against desires which, in a man so favoured, would displease the Lord.

The roll of prophecies which the Lord directed Jeremiah to dictate to Baruch, having been profanely burned by king Jehoiakim; Jeremiah and Baruch were thereupon commanded to prepare another roll, and to write "therein all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah



had burned in the fire: and there were added unto them many like words." But the many *like* words, which were probably additional threatenings or more minute declarations are, though addressed to the king and his people, not recorded. The same Holy Spirit who directed that the roll should be written, having deemed it unnecessary to preserve some of the parts; while *this word* of the Lord, to *Baruch the Scribe*, is honoured with a permanent place in the sacred pages which will be read in all nations while the world endures.

Therefore this message from the Lord to Baruch, though given in the first instance for his personal guidance and comfort, stands in the Holy Scriptures, the abiding word, for general edification. Believing it to be a divine injunction to the people of God *against Ambition*,—

We propose to consider

The DESCRIPTION the text gives of Ambition; the PROHIBITION of it, and the REASONS which are expressed or implied in reference to Ambition; or, I. Ambition described; II. Ambition prohibited; III. For what reasons.

#### I. Ambition *described*.

The question—*Seekest thou great things for thyself?* is a compact description of the *characteristic spirit* of Ambition; almost a perfect definition; expressing the thing itself, with its essential properties, and nothing more. If we think closely concerning the habitual aims and efforts of ambitious persons, we perceive that *great things* of some kind *for themselves* are constantly in their mind's eye.

Its chief points will come into view, if we consider the *objects*, the *subjects*, and the *manifestations* of Ambition.

##### 1. The objects.

Titles, honours, fame, authority, influence, and often, wealth also, are some of the great things desired and

pursued by those who seek great things for themselves. And, as it is when compared with each other that things *appear* small or great, the *love* of *superiority* is the master-vice of an ambitious mind. Wealth in these times, is perhaps as much valued for the influence, or the social importance with which it invests its possessor, as from the more obvious motives of avarice, or for self-indulgence in the pleasures wealth can procure. Hence avarice is now generally one of the forms of Ambition; and ostentation, or pompous display, is one of its offensive symptoms.

2. As to its *subjects*, Ambition is not confined to persons of high birth or rank, nor to important and conspicuous stations, to courts, or camps, to parliaments, or fields of battle. The famous instance of Cæsar, who declared that he would rather be the *first* man in a village, than the *second* in imperial Rome, shews that the spirit of Ambition, may not merely exist, but may find a sphere of action, of conflict, of triumph, in the humble scenes of common life.

Wherever religious societies have existed, on a large scale, and are no longer persecuted, the spirit of ambition will be found in operation along with the other mental vices which infest and corrupt human intercourse; and will be one of the disturbing influences which supplant love and destroy concord.

The essence of this spirit will be found in all cases to consist in a desire of *great things for self*.

This vice, like a sturdy weed, can live and flourish, independent of rich soil and high culture. While it will devour any amount of the gratifications which can be administered, in any form for which it has been prepared by habit; its appetite for distinction can accommodate itself to changes of condition. The hog, one of the grossest of brutes, is said to be capable of acquiring a daintiness, amidst the large supply of autumnal fruits in

thick forests ; though it can relish the coarsest food when there is no choice. The emperor of the French and king of Italy, after he had abundantly shewn that he desired to be nothing less than a king of kings, exhibited a pompous activity as *emperor of Elba*, and clung to every shred of titular distinction as the political captive at St. Helena. And the proud professor of religion, who would not find a pontificate or a continent too wide for his love of domineering, will contrive to make his ruling passion irksome to others in the narrower sphere of a Sunday-school, or village chapel, or a family. I have observed various practical illustrations of these.

3. Amongst the actual, but disguised, and often unsuspected, manifestations of Ambition, we may reckon the envy with which base minds regard human greatness generally, grandeur of character as well as rank or station. The discontent which repines, which frets, and growls, and struts in a humble lot, is a form of the same proud selfishness which seeks great things for self. Many who despair of attaining greatness, grudge the success of others ; and murmur at their own lot, while they naturally impute Ambition to those who succeed.

It seems to imply a degree of ambitious infirmity in the mind of Baruch that, at a season of impending national calamity, when every thing in Judea, from the cottage of the husbandman to the throne and the temple, was tottering on the verge of ruin, and thousands of lives were threatened with the unsparing sword of cruel conquerors, he should need any caution against seeking great things for himself. It appears to indicate that Ambition is a vice of a most stubborn and insidious nature ; that in the most unpromising times it will find means and pretences to flatter vain hope ; and that a servant of God who has even acted in the spirit of martyrdom, may need to be warned against this most plausible and deceitful form of selfishness.

We have to consider

*Secondly*, the PROHIBITION, "*Seek them not.*"

It admits of no question that, to *Baruch*, in particular, Ambition was forbidden.

But some will perhaps pause and dispute, before they will be satisfied to admit, that the prohibition is GENERAL. ~~Is~~ Ambition, or seeking great things for self, forbidden to *me*, to *you*?

Let other intimations of the mind of the Holy Spirit be compared with this. Numbers xvi. 39, 40. "And Eleazar the priest took the brazen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had offered; and they made broad plates for a covering of the altar: To be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the Lord said to him by the hand of Moses."

All the objects of Ambition are gratifications of pride. Let it be considered that pride is placed first among things which the Lord hates. Proverbs vi. 16. "A proud look," or haughty eyes, which is the marginal reading. And the testimony of Wisdom in Proverbs viii. 13. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth do I hate." The Apostle James reminds us that, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." Our Lord's searching enquiry, (Mark ix. 33, 34.) "What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?" evidently stirred in the consciousness of the disciples a degree of self-reproach; for "they held their peace," as being ashamed of the subject, and afraid to confess it; because "by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest?" He then proceeded to lay down a principle which condemns that *love of superiority* which is the root of Ambition, "He sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If

any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." The same proud sentiment is impressively censured by his caution against the spirit of the Scribes, in his charge to his disciples concerning them. Luke xx. 46. "Beware of the Scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts." Can the love of pre-eminence be more explicitly forbidden to Christ's disciples? But if further proof be sought, of the fact that it is so contrary to the spirit of a disciple, it is obviously given by the complaint of the Apostle John in his third Epistle, "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not."

*Thirdly*, the REASONS.

The prohibition of Ambition to godly men may be further corroborated by adducing the inconsistency of Ambition with all the spiritual virtues and graces. It is incompatible with purity and simplicity of intention; with such love of our neighbour as the law of Christ requires; with perfect love to, and delight in God; with true contentment, humility and heavenly mindedness.

It is not less inimical to peace in the church of Christ. Our divisions, and those of other churches, have made it painfully apparent that an ambitious man *out of office*, will be discontented, and will be tempted, by his own longings for power, and by envy of those who possess it, to use undermining arts against those who are in authority, and to offend his equals by arrogating to himself an importance which they will be moved to disallow: *in office* the same man will be likely to offend all by being haughty and overbearing.

It is obvious that all the really great men of the scripture history; those who obtained "the honour that cometh from God," did not seek great things for themselves.

Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, Saul in his best days, David and Daniel are illustrious examples. David's words in the 131st Psalm, in which he probably speaks as a type of Christ, disclaim the feelings and the course of an ambitious mind. "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me."

If the covetous man is an idolator, an ambitious man is no less so. Let all the disciples of Christ Jesus, seek real excellence, and covet earnestly the best gifts, the honour that cometh from God, the mind that was in Christ: but not great things for self. Pride and Ambition are the very opposites of what Paul points out as the mind which was in Christ. And Peter, repeating the testimony of James, almost in the same words, adds sayings which joins Pride with Ambition, and forbid both. His charge to the elders of churches being—"Feed the flock of God—taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock."—"Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."

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## BELSHAZZAR.

“Thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven.”—  
DANIEL v. 22, 23.

THE book of Daniel is neither wholly a history, nor wholly a prophecy; but, along with some very clear and important predictions, it is, in great part, a chronicle or memoir of remarkable events which happened in Daniel's time: those especially by which prophecy was fulfilled, or the dominion of divine providence manifested: many of them requiring him to act a firm and noble part, as a servant of God, in an influential and conspicuous station; and most of them deeply involving the temporal state of his afflicted nation, and the general interests of the visible church.

From other historians we learn, that a considerable space of time intervened between the scenes here presented and the events which are recorded in the preceding chapter: an interval which comprised the reigns of four kings of Babylon, successors of Nebuchadnezzar; the last of whom was the Belshazzar here mentioned, and who, in other histories of those times, is called Nabonadius and Labynetus.

The occurrences stated in this chapter, are some of the strangest and most terrible on record: rendered more memorable by supernatural manifestations, and terminating in the downfall of the first of the four great empires.

In examining the passage we have selected from this interesting portion of Old Testament history, we shall consider the words

I. As they refer to the crimes and judgments mentioned in this chapter.

II. As they suggest instruction and warning.

I. We shall refer to events then present, recent, or impending; most of these were either crimes or judgments.

First of all we shall briefly state the occasion of Daniel's being sent for into the presence of Belshazzar.

When this inglorious and unhappy prince came to the throne, the state was already full of disorder and corruption; the manners of the people were become effeminate; both their minds and bodies were enfeebled by luxury and indulgence, and the strength and authority of the empire had begun rapidly to decline.

At the time when Daniel was brought before Belshazzar, his vast metropolis was in a state of siege. One of his predecessors had wantonly provoked a dangerous war with the Medes; a powerful people who had assisted the kings of Babylon in the conquest of Nineveh, and whose formidable alliance had been one of the bulwarks of the Chaldean empire. The events of this imprudent and sanguinary contest, had been generally favourable to the Medes, whose cause was supported by their neighbours the Persians. By repeated overthrows, the Babylonians were so weakened and dispirited, that they durst no longer encounter their enemies in the field; but shut themselves up within the fortified walls of their vast capital. These walls are said to have been twenty-five yards broad, and one hundred yards high, and to have formed a regular square, each side of which was fifteen miles long; with twenty-five gates on each side, opening into as many streets. During the siege, this extensive fortification was the whole of Belshazzar's real kingdom, and contained all his actual and available resources. But the city being filled with wealth of every kind, stored with provisions for twenty years, encompassed outside the walls with a wide and deep moat, filled with water from the river, and defended by a very numerous garrison; the infatuated



government imagined itself secure, and derided the patient and determined efforts of the invaders. The imperious king and his dissipated court gave their time and attention to the soft luxuries and vain amusements of peace; instead of the austere toil and vigilance of war. While the enemy was thundering at their gates, or deeply revolving new plans for their destruction; they vied with each other in the splendour of dress and the pomp of entertainments; they ate, drank, sang, danced, and made merry; and not content with defying the besieging armies, they drank derision and defiance to the king of heaven. This was the climax of their daring course of permitted impiety; the measure of their iniquities was now full; and this last drop made the waters of bitterness overflow.

This last great provocation, which drew down the lingering vengeance that had long hung over Babylon, we shall state in the words of this record. "Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem: and the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone."

While these things were transacting, while the infatuated king was insulting Jehovah, and wounding the best feelings of His humbled and suffering people, God interposed in His own cause, and stopped the royal drunkard in his career of insolent impiety.

In the midst of his revelling, a mysterious apparition met the eyes of the astonished prince; and festive glow

and the noise of mirth were instantly turned into a scene of pale fright and screaming horror. "There came forth fingers of a man's hand," a hand without an arm or a body, nay part of a hand, "and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote." (A spirit,—see Job iv. 14, 15, "Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up.") "Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his bones were loosed, and his knees smote one against another." Well might his countenance be changed! His alarmed conscience foreboded evils of undefinable magnitude. In the height of his panic he called for the juggling magicians, the crafty soothsayers and pretended wise men, and urged them with the promise of vast rewards, to read and interpret the mysterious characters. The magnificent offers held out to them, incited them to attempt their utmost; but the terrible prodigy confounded their arts, and compelled them to acknowledge their ignorance.

From the manner in which Daniel was afterwards introduced, it appears as if, in the reigns intervening between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, he had fallen into neglect and obscurity, so as to be almost unknown to the king and his courtiers. Nebuchadnezzar had raised him to important employments and distinguished honours; but the successors of that great king seem to have inherited his pride and extravagance, without imitating his candour, his openness to conviction, and his sincere humiliation. Nebuchadnezzar had been accustomed to make Daniel his most trusted counsellor when his thoughts troubled him, and when his mind was agitated by supernatural intimations; but the successors of deceased sovereigns frequently neglect the friends and favourites of departed power; hence,

when Daniel's patron died, a new set of men would probably divide among them the favours of royalty, and he would be laid aside with the old administration.

But the fame of his former greatness and unequalled wisdom was still remembered by some, and particularly by the queen, probably the widow of one of the former monarchs, and supposed by some to be the mother of Belshazzar, and the aunt of Cyrus. The tumult in the banqueting house reached her ear in another part of the palace. She came to the hall of feasting and saw the whole assembly astonished, and the king half dead with fear. She reminded him of Daniel, and advised that he should be consulted concerning the tremendous mystery. (See verses 10, 11, 12.) "Now the queen by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed. There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers: forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding and interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar; now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation."

2. Daniel, long estranged from courts, was then brought before the royal presence in this hour of need; and the pale prince addressed him as follows: "Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king, my father, brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee,

and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof; but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing: and I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and thou shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom."

The heavenly minded Daniel heard these imperial offers not like a man of this world. None of the spectators detected the alacrity of worldly ambition sparkle in his eye when he was told of the scarlet robe, the chain of gold, and the third office in the kingdom. He introduces his reply like an incorruptible man. He had not been elated by the favour of princes, nor disheartened by their neglect. Therefore he shews no selfish eagerness, he uses no flattery, he betrays no frailty on this critical occasion, amidst the sincere compliments of the terrified king, and his lavish promises of power and honour. He calmly declines his proffered gifts and rewards; yet undertakes to read the writing and make known to him the interpretation.

3. But before he satisfied the king's anxious and torturing curiosity, he judged it right to put him in remembrance of some solemn circumstances which Belshazzar well knew, but which the pursuits of pride and folly had prevented him from recollecting or regarding: and by displaying the connexion of those circumstances with the portentous miracle before him, he prepared the way for an irresistible inroad into Belshazzar's guilty conscience.

He reminds him first of the power and grandeur of Nebuchadnezzar, and of the real cause of his greatness and prosperity,—the will of God. "O thou king, the most

high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father" (thy ancestor) "a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour, and for the majesty that He gave him, all people, nations and languages trembled before him; whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down." He reminds him of Nebuchadnezzar's offence, his heart being lifted up and his mind hardened in pride, forgetting that God ruleth, and that conquest and royalty are dependent on His will.

He repeats to Belshazzar what he already knew of Nebuchadnezzar's punishment, and the reformation it wrought in his haughty mind. "He was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him; and he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses; they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that He appointeth over it whomsoever He will."

He then, in the words of the text, tells him that all these striking providences were and must be well known to him; and that he ought to have taken warning and been humbled, by examples so instructive and judgments so impressive.

He boldly accuses him, to his face, of having sinned against knowledge and conviction; of remaining hardened, unhumiliated, and irreligious, notwithstanding he had all the proof he could desire or demand of the power, holiness, and severity of Israel's God.

He not only charges him with guilty neglect in being unhumiliated, but reproaches his pride and insolence in positive terms:—first, generally, in the text, "Thou, his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this, but hast lifted up thyself against the

Lord of heaven":—then, more particularly by singling out the aggravated instance of his recent profaneness: "They have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified."

He speaks pointedly and searchingly to the awakened conscience and trembling heart of the royal criminal; who was too sincerely terrified to interrupt or contradict him, when he said, "thou knewest all this."

By this introductory statement, Daniel intended to shew Belshazzar that his sin was aggravated and inexcusable; that he previously knew the power and terrors of the living God he had insulted; that he could not plead ignorance, being actually in possession of the most impressive information, sufficient to have cautioned him against such pride and profaneness as he had wantonly and ostentatiously displayed.

By reminding Belshazzar of what he was doing when he first saw the apparition, he shews his crime and the mystery before his eyes to be inseparably linked together; and recalls, with additional force, those insupportable feelings with which conscience overwhelmed Belshazzar, at the first sight of the hand and its writing.

All the time that the prophet was delivering this impressive exordium, the mysterious words were manifest on the wall; and the panic-stricken king had to endure at once the sight of this ominous message from the invisible world, and the calm unanswerable reproaches of the man of God.

4. Daniel, having finished his circumstantial and appalling charge, then, without disguise, evasion, or delay, proceeds to read the miraculous writing, to explain the

mysterious meaning of the portentous characters, and announce to the crowned sinner the consequences of his last provocation. At this juncture, we are told, the apparition of the fingers vanished, "and this writing was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: Mene; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Tekel; thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Peres; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

5. The last act of Belshazzar, which is here recorded, has a favourable aspect; and may be viewed as the outward and visible sign of an inward, spiritual humiliation, and, at the same time, of magnanimity. Though Daniel had been to him a prophet of evil, though he had heard from him nothing but reproof and denunciation, he immediately conferred upon him the rewards he had promised to whomsoever should read the writing and shew the interpretation of it. "He commanded, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom."

Not like Ahab, whose last mentioned act before going up to the fatal battle at Ramoth Gilead, contrary to the direct prohibition of God by the mouth of Micaiah, was to denounce Micaiah "to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son," saying, "Put this fellow in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace." The magnanimity of Belshazzar's conduct to Daniel, which the Holy Spirit has thus kept in remembrance, while the only further statement concerning him is "in that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain," gives some hope respecting him that though he was punished with a speedy and violent death, he may have delayed not to

humble his heart in true penitence and sorrow for sin, and may, through God's infinite mercy, have saved his soul alive.

II. The instruction and warning suggested by these events.

They are connected with principles of great and permanent importance. They illustrate

1. The power of *conscience*.

Why should Belshazzar, on a festive occasion, be overwhelmed with terror at the sight of a miracle, which flattery might have interpreted into an omen of new glories? The consciousness of general and recent guilt smote him—conscience told him that the invisible powers he insulted could not manifestly appear and interpose for his advantage.

Why should a proud tyrant hear a captive, whose life was at his disposal, accusing him so boldly and severely, without interruption or resentment? Conscience laid her paralysing hand upon him. Conscience, armed for a season with irresistible powers, held absolute dominion over the despot, and said, be still.

2. The *vanity* of the world, the feebleness, the less than nothingness of pomp, flattery, voluptuousness, dissipation, and profane amusement. How easily can God blast them all in a moment, and change the wild delirium of joy and grandeur to the intolerable agony of helpless, comfortless, desolate, unspeakable despair!

3. The *use* and *responsibility* of knowledge; and especially of the conviction resulting from the sight of God's judgments on others. When he inflicts signal vengeance on an individual or a nation, he expects and requires that spectators and survivors should humble their hearts before him and repent.

4. The *peril* of pride and profaneness instanced in this particular example. Is there not reason to suspect that



men are just on the brink of perdition when they defy earth and heaven !

5. The *terrors* of the invisible world, and the inexhaustible instruments of divine wrath. If so small a manifestation was attended with such irresistible and intolerable horror, what will be the effect when all the appalling sights and sounds of the world of torment, all the hideous apparitions of the realm of darkness, burst on the astonished view of a departing soul !

6. The *helplessness* of guilt, when God riseth up. "In the same night was Belshazzar the king slain," and his kingdom destroyed. Jeremiah li. 39-57.

7. The *superiority* of religious uprightness. What a shield, what a rock is piety ! How solid the grandeur of a man of God ! When the multitude are made to feel the powers of the world to come, the contempt and dishonour which appeared to them to cover the pious as a dirty veil, vanish in an instant. When the terrors of God are upon men, his servants appear to them invested with awful dignity, as almost more than mortal.

Contrast the trembling, crest-fallen, frightened king with the calm magnanimity, the awful goodness, and divine authority of the prophet of the Lord.

Let us now remind you of what you know.

You know that there is a God. You know His holiness and severity. You have heard of His judgments, His threatenings have been sounded in your ears, His gospel has been offered to you.

Have you *known all this* without effect? are you *still un-humbled*?

Are any of you profane? Dare you sleep to-night for the terror of your offended God? Does not your imagination portray a visionary hand writing your sentence? Does not your conscience see the balances of judgment held in heaven, and yourselves found wanting? Are there

no Belshazzars now, whose thoughts trouble them, because they *have known much* but *have not humbled themselves*, and who tremble under the weight of their guilty terrors? If any of you have at present Belshazzar's feelings, ought you not to apprehend a punishment as certain and as dreadful, without a speedy and sincere repentance?

Consider the superiority of your religious privileges over those of Belshazzar, and your proportionate responsibility, who live in a Christian country, under the light and advantages of the dispensation of grace, and with the warnings and precepts of God's holy word. If he was judged for not having profited by the example of Nebuchadnezzar, how will *you* answer for your unused and abused privileges? "Thou hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven." O let me warn and beseech you to presume no further on the forbearing mercy of God! Delay not to humble your hearts before Him, lest punishment swiftly overtake you in your sins. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

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## SCRIPTURAL VIEWS OF HUMAN LIFE:

A SERMON ON OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF THE REV. ROBERT  
NEWTON, D.D.

“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto Wisdom.”—PSALM xc. 12.

THIS Psalm is called in the Title, “A Prayer of Moses the Man of God;” and the internal evidence, afforded by the Psalm itself, gives a high degree of probability to the inscription. Some indeed have supposed that the writer was not Moses the Lawgiver, but some pious Jew of that name in later times. But only one Moses is mentioned in the Scriptures; and that part of this Psalm which has sometimes been pointed out as implying that it could not have been composed by the Jewish legislator, will rather, on examination, confirm the tradition, that *he* was the writer.

The tenth verse speaks of human life as being generally limited to an average of seventy years. Such a statement, it has been argued, was not likely to be made by one who retained perfect eyesight, and undiminished bodily strength, at the age of a hundred and twenty years; and it has been doubted, whether the actual shortening of human life, to about seventy years, had become general and obvious in the time of Moses.

But the record of a few lives, about his time, which exceeded seventy years, will prove no more concerning the average duration of life in those days, than the longevity of Thomas Parr or Henry Jenkins would prove concerning the average of modern lives.

And what was the case of his own nation, in his own time, with which Moses was best acquainted? The fact

was, that the contraction of human life, to its present average, was more extensively and impressively placed under the observation of Moses and his co-evals, Caleb and Joshua, than before any other observers of mankind in any age or country.

Moses led out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, six hundred thousand men, of age to bear arms, besides women and children. Of that vast multitude, all who, when numbered in the second year after their deliverance, were twenty years old and upwards, were buried in the wilderness in the course of forty years. So that, when Moses went up to Mount Nebo, to survey the land he must not enter, only three of those who were numbered, namely, Moses, Caleb, and Joshua, remained alive. Of those who soon afterwards passed the Jordan, not one, besides Caleb and Joshua, could be sixty years old; though some of those who died before Moses might be eighty or upwards.

Thus the greater part of that rebellious generation whom Moses had seen melt away in the wilderness, and who were men when they left Egypt, must have died under seventy years old. Towards the end of the forty years, Moses would rarely see an aged person. He would daily behold a young nation; in which, at length, after Caleb and Joshua, none were so much as half his own age.

It is appropriately said, in the ninth verse, concerning that discontented multitude of doomed wanderers, that "all" their "days" were "passed away in" God's "wrath,"—that is, under a sentence of his oath, recorded in the xiv. of Numbers, that their children should wander in the wilderness till the bones of the fathers were laid in the dust; so that, at the end of the appointed period of forty years, not one of the murmurers should be left above ground.

It is very suitably remarked in the tenth verse, that if, during the latter part of their wanderings, a few were so

strong as to linger on at fourscore years, those hoary elders of a stubborn race had little cause to rejoice in the hardy firmness of their constitution. With "labour and sorrow" they lived on; knowing that they could not survive the forty years, and must lie down dead in the wilderness before their children could enter the promised land.

The Psalm is nobly commenced with a sublime address to God on his own eternity. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." v. 1, 2. These allusions to the mysterious, unoriginated, and eternal *life of God*, introduce, by way of strong contrast, those pensive and solemn reflections on the frail *life of man*, which are expressed in most of the remaining verses.

The twelfth verse, which is our immediate subject, gives convenient occasion for considering the general scope of the Psalm, and for bringing most of the parts to bear on those views of human life which are urged in the Psalm at large, and by the text in particular.

I. The subject of the Psalm, and of the text, is HUMAN LIFE.

II. On this subject, the text expresses INSPIRED VIEWS, in the form of supplication.

I. The subject, human life, expressed by the phrase, "our days," is spoken of, both in the text and in the Psalm generally, as being at once *transitory* and *momentous*.

The *text* speaks of it as made up of days which may be numbered; and as the only season for the great work of applying our hearts unto wisdom.

The *Psalm* contains picturesque and impressive representations, both of its transitory and its momentous character.

1. By various bold and vivid figures, human life is exhibited in the Psalm as a brief and vanishing scene; while the text compactly expresses its brevity by speaking of it as consisting of *days* to be *numbered*.

The inspired historian of generations in which men lived nearly a thousand years, describes even such an antediluvian life as being, in God's sight, "but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night."

He compares the fleeting nature of man's life to a land-flood, which pours along for a few hours, and then leaves a dry channel, marked with ruins. He compares it to a sleep, which, when the slumberer awakes, seems but as a moment. He compares it to the grass of a season, in the morning green and flourishing, and in the evening cut down and withered. He compares it to a tale, a meditation, a reverie, mere passing thoughts; a tale that is *told*, and which, when told again, has lost its freshness; the events of a lifetime being in many respects but a stale repetition of what has happened before in the lives of others.

2. The *momentous* character and influence of human life are most affectingly shewn by the brief and forcible statement of three solemn circumstances—that it is spent under the eye of the God of truth and holiness, under sentence of death, and in danger of incurring the wrath to come.

The frail and sinful life of man is passed under the all-penetrating and incessant observation of the ever-living and omniscient Spirit, who said to the Israelites in the wilderness, "Ye shall be holy: for I, the Lord your God, am holy." Leviticus xix. 2. "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance:"—words which convey the idea of a being, conscious of inexcusable defects and blemishes, placed amidst the intolerable illumination of the concentrated rays of a burning glass.

Like the Israelites of that day, we spend our lives under sentence of death. "Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men;" which is an evident allusion to the doom pronounced on the guilty father of mankind. "Till thou return unto the ground: for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." "For we are consumed by thine anger," says the Psalmist, in the seventh and ninth verses, "and by thy wrath are we troubled. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath." These sayings point not only to the punishment of the murmurers in the wilderness, but to the general sentence of death, and to the consequent expectation of it, as portentously overshadowing all the days of mankind. Divine displeasure against sin is manifested by a penalty which hangs over every individual among the living; so that we may correctly say of every man in his health and strength, that there is a general decree of the Almighty which efficaciously says, "Return to the ground:—for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." It may also be said, in the name of all mortals, liable as they are to wasting disease, or to other forms of change and decay, the end of which is death,—“For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.” And “all our days are passed away in thy wrath;” because every day is passed under a liability to that mortal change, which is the inevitable effect of God’s ancient and enduring displeasure against sin.

We spend our short and uncertain lives under a solemn necessity for working out our salvation with fear and trembling, that we may escape the immeasurable evils of “the wrath to come.” “Who knoweth the power of thine anger?” etc., verse 11; rendered by an eminent foreign divine, “Who considereth the power of thine anger, and thy wrath, in proportion as it is terrible?”—words which imply that our most awful conceptions of the wrath to

come are far below the tremendous reality. Most persons, while they feel constrained to acknowledge that life is short and uncertain, do not sufficiently consider its powerful and decisive influence over the future;—how, in these few years or days, so like a rushing flood, a dreamy sleep, the grass of a summer, a tale that is told, a meditation, or a reverie, we shall either escape or incur a boundless and cureless calamity.

The momentous importance and power of this transient life of ours arise especially from its being not only the *proper*, but the *only* season for the great work of *applying our hearts unto wisdom*—the wisdom that discerns opportunities, that foresees wants and dangers, and provides accordingly, by timely and resolute exertion. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” Departed souls may have powers of activity unknown to us, and surpassing all our notions of their peculiar condition, but no power to work out a neglected salvation. Their thoughts may contrive or contemplate many devices, but no devices for recovering or substituting the wasted opportunities of the acceptable time, and day of salvation. Their knowledge is probably vast, and wonderful both in its nature and in the mode of acquisition; but no lost soul among them all can know the Lord as God his Saviour, when once long-suffering has given place to avenging terrors. Wisdom to judge aright may be with the disembodied in an eminent degree; but to those who have died in their sins, it is the wisdom that comes too late, when the fatal mistake is already committed, and no remedy remains.

II. On the subject of human life, the text expresses inspired views, in the form of supplication.

1. It teaches the nature and importance of a right estimate of human life.



The importance of justly estimating our time on earth is implied by the prayer for instruction *to number our days*.

The act of valuing or estimating moral and spiritual subjects,—such as the actions, motives, and dispositions of men,—is often expressed in the Scriptures by terms borrowed from the language of trade. Things are bought and sold by weight, measure, or number; and each of these modes of expressing quantity is figuratively employed in the sacred writings. The following passages are examples—“The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by His actions are *weighed*.” 1 Samuel ii. 3. “The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He *pondereth* all his goings.” Proverbs v. 21. “God hath *numbered* thy kingdom, and finished it.”—“Thou art *weighed* in the balances and art found wanting.” Daniel v. 26, 27. “Lord make me to know mine end, and the *measure* of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.” Psalm xxxix. 4. Of the knowledge of God, as a subject of human investigation, it is said, “It is as *high* as heaven; what canst thou do? *deeper* than hell; what canst thou know? The *measure* thereof is *longer* than the earth, and *broad*er than the sea.” Job xi. 8, 9. “Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the *price* thereof:—It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be *weighed* for the price thereof.” xxviii. 12-15.

These various expressions have one general meaning when applied to moral or spiritual subjects. To weigh or ponder, to measure, or to number, is to estimate the quantity or value of what may be under consideration. To number is to estimate by count or tale; and stands here as a particular expression for a general one. To estimate or value is the meaning intended.

Many appear to have made *no* estimate of life—of its probable duration and proper business. They have never earnestly thought—Why was I born? Why am I spared? Whither am I bound? When shall I pass away?

Many have taken a *false* estimate of the *probable duration* of their own continuance on earth. While they admit the shortness and uncertainty of life as to men in general, they seem to have tacitly reserved their own case as an exception.

“All men think all men mortal but themselves.”

Hence though they have not actually and consciously concluded, as the result of comparison and calculation, that they shall live always, they act as if they *had* so concluded.

Such persons also take a false estimate of the *great purposes* of life. To secure ease, amusement, gross pleasures, sordid gain,—to maintain and establish a family,—to build up a high reputation,—to rise above equals,—to die rich,—or even to vegetate and rot near the place of their birth, like a plant, without object, or plan, or affection,—are amongst the various paltry ends for which multitudes seem to be living.

The *true* estimate is according to what has been already deduced from the observations in this Psalm. Life is transitory, but momentous;—a brief, but awful introduction to an endless and mysterious future;—a short, decisive passage to nothing less than heaven or hell.

The *importance* of a right estimate is apparent from the transcendent character of those immense realities, unspeakably glorious or terrible, which it brings forth to view, and presses on our attention; and from the fact that the mistakes of carelessness on this subject are dreadfully ruinous. He who has taken *no* thought, and he whose thoughts on this subject *are wrong*, are in danger of being lost for ever. Right views are necessary in order to a right use of life; and therefore indispensable as the means to avoid even a worse result than living in vain.

2. The text expresses inspired views on what has last

been pointed out,—the connection of a right estimate with a right application. The great benefit, the profitable use of our being taught to number our days is—that it will incline us to apply our hearts unto wisdom.

The good effects of the correct views obtained by thorough religious consideration are various,—such as—rational distrust of temporal enjoyments and possessions, regarding ourselves as but tenants-at-will,—moderate desire and and pursuit of the things of time and sense,—practical conviction of the essential absurdity of avarice, ambition, and all the mental vices,—patient endurance of inconveniences and afflictions,—sobriety of mind, neither intoxicated nor tantalized with vain joys or delusive hopes.

The most valuable result is—to learn that far-seeing, sure-aiming prudence, that most excellent and profitable wisdom, which, in the fear of God, subordinates all other concerns to the paramount and indispensable purpose of providing for a mysterious and endless future. To apply our hearts unto wisdom, is heartily to seek and obey that wisdom which begins in the fear of the Lord; it is to prepare to meet God; to use effectually the means of salvation; to come to Christ, take his yoke upon us and learn of him, that we may be wise unto salvation.

A solemn sense of the matter of fact—that this life is a short passage to one of the two everlasting abodes, heaven or hell,—will naturally tend to engage our hearts in the pursuit of wisdom, and in obedience to it when attained. Such was the effect on those elders, those ancient worthies, who by faith “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” and “obtained a good report;” the written word of God bearing permanent testimony, from the days of the prophets to the end of the world, that they “pleased him.”

3. The great and certain means of securing both right

views, and an effectual application of such views to the conduct of life, is *Divine teaching*, sought by earnest *prayer*.

Mere moral reflections on human life, however just or profound, often avail chiefly to produce deep, habitual despondency. To survey life only in its circumstances of shortness, uncertainty, frailty, struggles, disappointments, miseries, and decay, without looking above and beyond it, leads naturally to querulous inactivity. Worldly moralists and philosophers have often and eloquently displayed the vanity of life; but they and their disciples have remained strangers to its right *use*, and to the power and means of making it *blessed*.

And when right views *are* presented, and authenticated by Divine testimony, it is not merely the hearing or reading of the truth that will suffice. Many both know and acknowledge what the Scriptures say on these subjects, and verbally assent to the appeals and exhortations of Christ's messengers, who yet continue to regard life in a vain, worldly, frivolous, sordid, idolatrous manner, and do not apply their hearts unto wisdom.

Divine teaching, the teaching of the Holy Spirit, can alone give us true views of life, or persuade and enable us to apply our hearts, our whole mind, will, and affection, to the practical following out of such principles.

This indispensable teaching will be effectually given to those who sincerely pray for it. *Preventing grace*, which is the grace which precedes conversion, is largely bestowed on multitudes who are never converted; because they do not "truly repent, and unfeignedly believe the gospel;" and who was ever converted of whom it could not previously be said—"Behold, he prayeth?"

You who have been "seeking rest, and finding none;" incessantly dissatisfied and disappointed, even in the season of success; behold the cause of the vanity and

vexation you have been unable to escape!—you have been misled by false views of life; or you have neglected to pray earnestly for Divine teaching, to enable you so to consider and understand the whole matter, that you may terminate the sad series of errors and vexations, by henceforth applying your hearts unto wisdom.

Dr. Doddridge, whose eminently holy and useful life was closed above a hundred years ago, [1751,] had for the motto of his family arms, a short Latin sentence, signifying, “Live while you live;” which he thus paraphrased in verse,—

“Live while you live, the epicure would say,  
Enjoy the pleasures of the passing day :  
Live while you live, the sacred preacher cries,  
And give to God each moment as it flies :  
Lord, in my life let both united be—  
I live in pleasure while I live to Thee.”

Our own Christian poet compactly expresses the main truth on these subjects in the line—

“Wisdom, and Christ, and heaven, are one.”

Respecting the eminent servant and minister of Christ, who has now been removed from us, it was generally known, previously to any account of his last moments, that he received divine teaching in the morning of life, enabling and disposing him to apply his heart unto wisdom; and that the time must have been little short of sixty years during which he had consistently and unfalteringly persevered in the paths of true godliness. Such a blameless course of action could not on other principles have been so long maintained.

The following narrative, which, in substance, was supplied from Easingwold, evinces chiefly the holy calmness, the bright serenity, with which, by the blessing of God, he was enabled to pass through the valley of the

shadow of death ; and shews, what might most reasonably have been expected, his life of mercies crowned with a triumphant end.

The Rev. Robert Newton, D.D., was born at Roxby, a village near the sea coast between Whitby and Guisbro', in the North-Riding of Yorkshire, on the 8th of September, 1780. In early youth he saw by the light of the Holy Spirit, his need of salvation ; and while in the exercise of *private prayer*, was enabled so to trust in Christ, as to find "redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." At the age of eighteen he began to proclaim to his fellow-sinners "the unsearchable riches of Christ ;" and was called to the regular ministry, by Christ and His church, before he was nineteen.

Of his subsequent course, and his appointments to the principal circuits in the Wesleyan Connexion, nothing need now be said in detail. His travels and labours in England, Ireland, and America, are known among various communities of the church of Christ. Nor is it needful to dwell here on his uniform kindness and Christian love to his fellow-men. After having preached the glorious gospel, with extraordinary diligence and success, for upwards of half a century, his increasing infirmities constrained him to retire from the public ministry at the Conference of 1852, and his name appears on the *Minutes* as a supernumerary, residing at Southport ; but Easingwold was the place chosen as his last earthly home. For some months before his decease, he frequently expressed to his family his earnest desire to see them "all comfortably settled at Easingwold,"—a desire which was accomplished some time before the commencement of his last sickness.

He arrived at Easingwold on Tuesday, the 11th of April, 1854 ; and when the superintendent called to congratulate him on his arrival, and to express a hope that he might yet

be spared for some time to afford us his help and counsel, he very cheerfully, but solemnly remarked,—“Thank you, sir, but *my work is done.*”

On the evening preceding his illness, he observed to a friend, that the tabernacle was being gently taken down, to prepare him for a better state of being. On the following morning, Mrs. Newton read the first chapter of Hebrews as the lesson at family worship, and his prayer consisted of a beautiful running comment on that chapter, which refers to the Godhead and atonement, and final exaltation of Christ. He referred in conclusion to his own infirm health, and prayed that Christ might be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. A few minutes after prayer, Mrs. Newton entered the room, and found him very ill; and it soon became evident that his end was approaching. After remaining apparently unconscious for several hours, he gradually rallied, and appeared to be engaged in prayer. To the inquiry, “Do you feel Christ precious?” he replied, “Oh, yes; Christ Jesus attesting and blessing;” and soon after said, “I have every happiness.” “Christ is mine and I am His.” “I shall soon be with Him for ever.” “Christ is my rock.” He then said to one of his daughters, “pray for a happy exit.” He then prayed for his family with expressions of earnest trust in the mercy of God. When one of his daughters quoted the lines—

“Away, sad doubt, and anxious fear!  
Mercy is all that’s written there.”

he sweetly smiled and said, “I have no fear,—I have no alarm,—‘perfect love casteth out fear.’” He frequently said “God is good”—“God is with us”—“God is love,” and several times alluded to his death as a *falling asleep*: an anticipation which the event realised.

Some hours before his departure, the Rev. J. Rossell inquired—“Doctor, have *you now the strong* consolation in

Christ Jesus, which you have so long recommended to others?" to which he at once replied with delightful impressiveness, "Yes, yes." To this visit, and the prayer offered up in his behalf, he made pleasing allusion afterwards—praying for heaven's best blessing to rest upon the minister.

His attachment *to*, and confidence *in*, our beloved Methodism, seemed (if that were possible) to increase, when viewing it from that margin of eternity upon which he then stood. "*Methodism*," he observed, "Methodism, is the work of God—I am a Methodist, a Methodist preacher,—Glory be to God,—An old Methodist preacher." But though a Methodist, he was no bigot: hence one of the petitions of the last prayer to which his family listened, was "God bless the church of England."

Thus for nearly five days, he continued gradually sinking, though often with a smile which seemed borrowed from that world to which he was hastening. His strong constitution retained its hold of life longer than is usual in such cases. On Saturday morning, he once more bade farewell to all his family, and then uttered with great energy, among others, the following sayings:—"the preaching that flows from the heart does good every day"—"he that believeth shall never die"—"Christ Jesus, the ransom of sinners and the life of the dead"—"fear sin, not death." After which, sinking back exhausted, he said, "going—going—going to glory"—"farewell sin, farewell death"—"praise the Lord,"—and fell asleep about noon, from which he awoke no more, slumbering on for many hours till the summons came, and he was received into the immediate presence of the Lord, about four o'clock on the following morning, April 30.

In attempting to give a general view of the *character* of the great and good man, who has thus been taken from



among us,—while avoiding the error of claiming for him a general pre-eminence, or of assuming that he had no frailties—we are free from the perplexity which must arise from a consciousness of something to be plausibly concealed, or to be tenderly passed over. In this case there are no concealments required, no apologies to be made.

The public labours of Dr. Newton,—labours various and abundant, and almost without parallel,—have rendered his life nearly a *public* one, from early youth to declining age ; so that he might almost have said to our part of the Israel of God, in the words of aged Samuel,—“I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. Behold, here I am : witness against me before the Lord.” 1 Sam. xii. 2, 3.

In the course of his “labours more abundant” it is believed, with great probability, that, in behalf of religious and benevolent institutions, he travelled more miles, delivered more sermons and public addresses, and obtained a larger aggregate of contributions, than any other minister of the gospel in his time. That he should go through such labours, with the buoyant energy of which thousands were delighted witnesses, might be accounted for by referring to his rare endowments of body and mind, which enabled him to hold on his peculiar course with untiring alacrity ; and to his unexampled popularity, which rendered it difficult for a minister of his kind disposition to avoid an incessant series of solicitations and public engagements. During the year it was my privilege to be his colleague, I saw him on most Saturday evenings, and generally found him seated by a large table covered with letters requiring to be considered and answered ; yet I never heard from him an expression of impatience, at the tax on his time and attention which such a correspondence involved. But the admirable Christian propriety with which he held on his pure and shining way, through the duties and temptations

of such a life, must have had a deeper cause than gifts of nature or favourable circumstances. Had he not been habitually walking humbly with God, and from youth to age, with steadfast purpose, applying his heart unto wisdom, how could he have so happily escaped the silken snares and dangerous illusions of popular favour? To see delighted crowds looking and listening with eager admiration,—to be applauded in public, and welcomed in private, by old and new friends, in all parts of his native land, and wherever he appeared as a minister of Christ elsewhere,—were as common to him as his daily bread. Yet such were the wisdom and gentleness with which he pursued the even tenour of his way, that he might have said before many witnesses—"Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.—My soul is even as a weaned child."

In many respects the *moral excellence* of his character, viewed in connexion with his fine natural endowments, his early piety, and long tried faithfulness, leaves room for doubt as to how much of that excellence was founded in original happiness of disposition, how much was the operation of the grace of God in him, and how much was the result of self-culture and self-discipline. But we cannot be far wrong in allowing a large share of influence, in his case, to each of these powerful causes.

His personal character was unaffectedly manly and noble. There is obvious truth in the remark that he was *one of nature's noblemen*. The charm of manner which attended his presence, whether speaking or listening, in public or in private, appeared to be but the outward and visible sign of what was honourable and glorious within.

Yet, in his well-balanced nature and habits, nobleness was well combined with *Christian prudence*. He had no eccentricities, no whims, no oddities, no crotchets. A manly

soundness of judgment rendered it impossible for this class of weaknesses to have a place in his mind or life. His excellent disposition and Christian kindness rendered his dignified bearing open and affectionate; while a sagacious presence of mind enabled him to observe a discreet caution without a reserved manner.

When occasion required, he was found no less distinguished by *fortitude* in the path of integrity. If the faithful performance of what he deemed his duty was likely to displease many admiring friends, he did not as a man-pleaser, jealously guard his popularity at the expense of principle; but boldly cast his popularity into the scale of right; taking his stand with truth and duty at all hazards; and cheerfully bearing any reproach which came as the result of Christian fidelity. In fact his extraordinary popularity was not an artificial, but a real and natural thing: not a laboured and fragile structure, built up with careful and dexterous handling of frail materials; but a vigorous plant of renown, deeply rooted, of majestic height, with extended branches and perennial verdure.

In the widely diversified scenes of social intercourse amidst which he moved, his condescending *courtesy* and *kindness* were seen and felt by persons of all classes. If, on his first visit to a place, he had been kindly received as the guest of a family in humble life, he would not afterwards be tempted away to sumptuous mansions. He acted, as much as any disciple we have known, on the rule—"Go not from house to house."

The circuits in which he was stationed, and the congregations he visited by invitation, had alike occasion, from uniform experience, to depend on his considerate and conscientious *punctuality*.

Eminent and admired as he was in his own walk of excellence, he did not affect universality of accomplishment. A close observer in the Conference, or in the social

circle, might easily perceive that there were some kinds of mental exercise which he did not sedulously cultivate; but which, at the same time, he was far from undervaluing or depreciating. He often and gracefully expressed a generous and just appreciation of talents and services very different from his own.

In all these various and combined forms of goodness, there might be discerned the ruling influence of long-formed principles, pervading his thoughts, feelings, labours, and deportment, with the steadfast purposes of a mind taught of God to estimate life aright, and to apply the heart unto wisdom.

A man of such singular eminence might be presumed to have obvious *mental characteristics*. It might almost be said that the hand-writing of Dr. Newton's mind was familiarly known and read of all men. Strong sense, and sound evangelical divinity were the basis of his sermons. I first heard him in the spring of 1817, having gone fourteen miles for the purpose. It is impossible to reckon the number of times I have since heard him, always with pleasure and profit, often with admiration. For more than thirty years I have maintained that those who accounted for the wonderful impression of his preaching chiefly on the ground of his delivery, did injustice to the intrinsic excellence of his sermons. The matter, arrangement, and language were excellent. In the management of his subjects he evinced a degree of artistic skill, which is often wanting in preachers who are more ambitiously intellectual. His style was at once easy, elegant, perspicuous, and forcible; and, of late years, much varied according to the subject and occasion. He had, in an extraordinary measure, the precious power of investing common or neglected truth with lively and attractive interest. For the great purposes of Christian instruction, such a power is more valuable and efficacious than even

originality of thought. Dr. Newton so preached the great doctrines and common truths of Christianity, that persons of all degrees of mental culture found it a delight to listen to him ; and multitudes were thus willingly engaged in hearing the very principles they had previously neglected or despised, most impressively and persuasively recommended.

Those who have sometimes spoken of the matter of his sermons as *common-place*, are little aware that they unwittingly betray their ignorance. I have ascertained that many persons use this phrase when they mean nothing which would not be more properly expressed by the single word—common. It is by the mere force of ignorant or careless usage that these two expressions have become at all exchangeable terms. Hearing well-informed persons speak of common-place appropriately, ignorant persons have applied it blunderingly, as an equivalent for common, and as a more learned and refined phrase. Many who pragmatically decide that certain sermons are common-place, have yet to learn what is *properly* signified by the expression.

The ancient SOPHISTS were the first inventors of common-places, or sources of arguments or remarks COMMON *to subjects of every kind*. They pointed out, as an aid to invention, that things to be spoken of, however different from each other, had such points *in common*, as genus, species, cause, effect, antecedents, consequents, likeness, contrariety, circumstances of time and place, and many others. They undertook that their disciples, by the use of these helps, should be able to speak copiously and plausibly on every subject ; though their knowledge of the things spoken of might be very scanty and superficial ; and though they might use this mechanical system to evade the labour of solid research and earnest meditation. The matter collected and exhibited by such means must

generally have been trivial, and very little to the purpose either of instruction or persuasion.

But to speak of the great and paramount truths of the gospel,—truths not discovered or invented by man, but revealed from heaven,—in such a manner as to rouse the supine, to interest the careless, to excite the lukewarm, to awe the profane, to animate the dejected, to confirm the wavering, to disarm the prejudiced, and to command the attention of all,—though the things thus spoken of should be as common as sin or grace, as temptation or remorse,—to do this demands treasures and powers of mind not to be found, or created, or substituted by a recourse to common-places. The expression would be most improperly used in describing the matter or quality of Dr. Newton's sermons. The *commonness* of the important and saving truths he mainly dwelt upon and successfully enforced, connected as it was with the very *uncommon* attractiveness and power of his manly eloquence, was not a fault to be excused, but a merit to be gratefully acknowledged.

It must have been evident to all discerning and candid minds, that in him there was a fine combination of glorious faculties; the admirable result of which was an eminently great, good, amiable, useful, happy man; and, altogether, such a master of sacred eloquence, that, as was truly said in a felicitous paper in the *Watchman*, [May 3rd,] *he can have no successor*. We shall never look upon his like again.

He did not become great by being an imitator; and no one has imitated him with success. God may, and probably will, raise up men as eloquent and as useful; but those future worthies in our Israel will not be copies, not artificial; but true, unaffected men.

In his fidelity to Christ, his benevolence, diligence, and consistent perseverance, we may, and ought to follow him. Happy shall we be, if, like him, we are found faithful,

and at last ready, so that we may as joyfully depart. In his case the words of the Christian poet were happily exemplified—

“Submissive to Thy just decree,  
We all shall soon from earth remove ;  
But when thou sendest, Lord, for me,  
O let the messenger be love !  
Whisper Thy love into my heart,  
Warn me of my approaching end ;  
And then I joyfully depart ;  
And then I up to heaven ascend.”

For such happiness to be ours, we also must earnestly pray for, and submissively receive divine teaching, that we may rightly number our days, and effectually apply our hearts unto wisdom.

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## THE DAY OF MY DEATH.

“I know not the day of my death.”—GENESIS xxvii. 2.

THE near approach of a new year is one of those circumstances which impressively remind us of the progress of *time*: the general and regular progress of time carries with it the progress of each individual *life*: and the progress of life is continually bearing us onward to its inevitable *termination—the day of our death*. Another year will soon be numbered with the thousands that have passed since the creation: another year will soon be added to the lives of hundreds of millions of human beings; or, rather, to speak more strictly according to the actual course of things, another year will soon have completely gone from us and our innumerable fellow beings, into the regions of the past; beyond our reach or control; and the march of time, destined to conclude with the day of judgment, will have advanced a year nearer to its last step.

The words of the text were spoken by the patriarch Isaac, and concisely express the common conviction of all thoughtful persons. All who reflect, acknowledge that they *know not the day of their death*. But the patriarch's reflection was not an instance of insipid, formal, barren, moralising. *His* solemn thought was followed up with consistent action. *His* sense of the uncertainty of life determined him to give immediate practical attention to his earnest purposes, without presumptuously or indolently speculating on future possible opportunities.

This reflection of the Hebrew patriarch was connected with his wish and intention to bless Esau before he died. “And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son; and he said unto



him, Behold, here am I. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death : Now therefore, take, I pray thee, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison ; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat ; that my soul may bless thee before I die."

The blessings pronounced by the holy patriarchs on their children, were not merely expressions of a father's kind wishes and prayers ; they were inspired predictions, giving a bold and firm outline of the great events which would interest their posterity for about two thousand years. But Isaac, though a prophet, and even when he foretold the distant times of Herod the Great, an Edomite, in whose person Esau had the dominion seventeen hundred and sixty years after Isaac blessed his sons, confessed that he knew not the day of his own death.

It would be a waste of time and words to attempt seriously to prove to you that *you* know not the day of your death. Certainly none of us dispute the statement, though many of us are probably wanting in a practical and religious regard to this very plain and important fact. The common fault is not ignorance or denial of this fact, but inattention,—neglecting to lay it to heart.

Instead of labouring to prove what no one denies, or to explain what all understand, we shall be better employed in considering the weighty, rational consequences, which this acknowledgment of our common ignorance involves.

These consequences are of two kinds :

I. Matters of common concern.

II. Matters of common religious prudence.

I. Matters of common concern. The awful mixture of the *known* and *unknown* in our present mysterious state of being.

1. That *SOME* future day will be the day of our death is *known*—WHAT day *UNKNOWN*.

A day is coming when we shall be actually *dying*.

God *could* reveal it, but He reserves this among the secret things. Doubtless there are good reasons for the concealment ; but it is an awful secret.

2. This unknown coming day will end our state of trial.

It is *known* that it *will* end it ; *how* unknown.

This life is our ONLY state of probation. After death there is no new course of trial,—but the judgment.

Death is the end of life,—therefore as we know not when *life* will end, we know not the measure or bounds of our state of trial.

While we live, various small, frequent, and almost imperceptible influences are powerfully and constantly operating upon us ; not the least of these influences being our own conduct, in thought, word, and deed ;—these influences are gradually forming, changing or fixing the prevailing character of our mind, heart, and habits. The day of death, so inevitable, so hidden, comes at last, and finally fixes the character it finds. Until the day of our death we are acquiring, whether we intend it or not, a title, a qualification, and a readiness for our eternal inheritance.

We are even *now* ready for one of the two worlds. Were we to die *this* year, within the brief space that remains of it, our case would not in any degree perplex the judge of all, nor would there be any suspense in the divine mind as to our proper sentence.

Only until the day of our death can we exert the awful power of choice.

3. This unknown expected day *may* be very near—we know not *how* near. The times of the antediluvians are passed.

No sensible person expects to live longer than the average of mankind.

Every reasonable person in years will assent to the saying, Behold now, I am old, and therefore cannot live long; but I know not the day of my death. It is at hand in the course of nature, but various forms of sudden death may anticipate the process of natural decay. If we assume the probability of our living, not merely as long as *most*, but, as long as *any* of all that are now among the living, still, the day is *at hand*; but we know not the number of our days, nor the name of our dying day.

4. This unknown, inevitable day is known to be approaching, but its stealthy footsteps are *unseen* and *unheard*, like an enemy marching to the attack behind dark woods or dense fog.

Time moves in a way so soft and still, that we need the alarm of revolving periods—seasons, years, and centuries—to remind us that it really does move. By an incessant gliding step from moment to moment, time has calmly travelled on without hurry or effort, through the thousands of years since God said, “Let there be light,” etc., “and the evening and the morning were the first day.” By a moment at a time *we* have travelled on from infancy to our present state of maturity or decay. But the march of death is as silent to our ear, as hidden from our eye, as ever. The boundless future is immediately before us, but a veil is upon it,—a veil of clouds and thick darkness. By faith we know something of that awful future, as well as the wonderful and various fact: but even faith discerns not the day of our death.

5. It is known that to make us forget this day, and to neglect our preparation for it, is the object of many temptations; but the tempter, like the day, keeps himself concealed. What would be our horror and anxiety if we could occasionally perceive his dreadful proximity! The multitude consequently live as if the slow succession of moments could never fill up the appointed period. The

love of the world and the example of others, make us willing and prone to forget that death is approaching.

6. This unknown, inevitable day will bring a *moment* like the day itself—as *unknown*—but its decisive influence still more concentrated and formidable—the moment of giving up the ghost.

The last moment is like life itself condensed to a point.

It is for all life's purposes the last opportunity.

It stamps the seal of unalterable fate on the eternity that follows.

II. Consider the matters of religious prudence which this subject involves, that is,

What course of safe and effectual precaution our mysterious and momentous position requires.

We acknowledge that we know not the day of our death, but to confess this truth is not enough; we should not let it be a barren reflection, but make it a ground of action.

Suppose any of us could be so irrational or perverse as to deny it—what then? What conduct might be expected from a person who would seriously contradict this doctrine of common sense?

There have been cases of mental derangement, in which the person has been mad on one single subject, and rational on others.

Suppose a madman to be deranged only on this point; to be persuaded that he had received a particular and private revelation assuring him that he should live a certain great number of years, or that he was so deluded as to fancy he had discovered a medicine which would triumph over all diseases and preserve life without end. There have actually been philosophical madmen who affirmed that there was no necessity for dying, and that they could themselves live as long as they would.

How might a man so demented or infatuated on one point be expected to act?

Under the influence of the carnal mind, such a person would follow, without restraint, the devices and desires of his own heart. He would begin many things, would enthusiastically undertake various temporal enterprises, unchecked by any fear of not living to finish them. He would either indulge himself without fear, or (as a different natural temper might prompt him) would provide and lay up in store without limit. In short, he would act as worldly men do act; but *he* would be consistent—they are most palpably inconsistent.

But the plain truth which the text expresses, and which we all acknowledge, requires imperatively a safe course of precaution adapted to the exigency of our mysterious and momentous situation.

It requires not only *some* precautions; but such as will *make us safe*, and *keep us so*.

The elements of such precaution are comprised in *selection, order, diligence*, constant and complete *readiness*.

1. The acknowledged brevity of life demands thoughtful *selection* in our objects: within this brief period we cannot find time for many pursuits which in different circumstances might seem desirable: we must therefore seek what is best—"First the kingdom of God and His righteousness." The greatest and highest objects of human life are expressed in two lines:—

"To glorify my God below,  
And find my way to heaven."

Christ "is the way, the truth, and the life."

2. The *known* uncertainty of life, the hidden state of its last portion, should teach us the prudence and importance of attending to its best and most indispensable purposes FIRST.

The greatest purposes of life are those which will yield most satisfaction at its end.

First, be *safe*; then *useful*; then *happy*.

3. Both together,—brevity and uncertainty,—require DILIGENCE in attending to the best and most necessary things.

4. The momentous influence of our final hour requires constant and complete *readiness*. Many things, if we do them amiss the first time, may be better done the second time. We have but *once* to die: this must be done well first or never.

Be ye ready: “for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.”

Watch and pray and strive that when that day, that hour, that moment may arrive, it may not overtake you as a thief.

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## DIVINE PROTECTION.

“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”—PSALM xxxiv. 7.

IN the former part of this Psalm, David praises the Lord for gracious deliverance from his own peculiar troubles, and calls upon his brethren to rejoice with him, and to join in his zealous and devout thanksgivings. He speaks like one so fully impressed with great and recent mercies as to be ready to say—I can never doubt again. In this verse he passes on from the grateful acknowledgment of his own mercies, to the general fact : the divine care and protection assured to all truly godly persons. He then exhorts others to make the goodness and faithfulness of God matter of personal experiment. “O taste and see that the Lord is good : blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints ; for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger : but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” He then offers to instruct any who are willing to learn the fear of the Lord. “Come, ye children, hearken unto me : I will teach you the fear of the Lord.” He concludes the Psalm with various weighty and animating testimonies, concerning the certain deliverance of the godly from the sorrows and perils of time, and from the mightier evils which await the wicked in eternity.

The Psalm contains impressive allusions to Christ. “Many are the afflictions of the Just One,” so the word “righteous” is rendered in some instances ; and in Paul’s defence before the Jews at Jerusalem, he thus reports the words of Ananias to him at Damascus, “The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that *Just One*, and shouldest hear the voice

of His mouth." Acts xxii. 14. Also in verse 20, it is written, "He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken."

The closely connected parts of the subject set before us in these words, are

The expressed character,

The implied militant state,

The divine safeguard,—of the sort of persons spoken of; them that fear the Lord.

I. Their expressed character, *them that fear Him*.

The substance of the character, thus briefly given, is true religion. Fear, a part of personal religion, or godliness;—reverential fear, controlling the thoughts, feelings, and actions, is, by a natural figure of speech, mentioned here, as a part representing the whole. The natural ground of this is—that, even in the case of machines, consisting of inanimate parts, so connected as to be acted upon by a motive power, such as wind, water, or steam, or an elastic spring, or a weight and pulley; the actual working of the machine shows that the necessary parts are there, and are properly connected with each other, and with the power that moves them. When we see the hands move on the face of a clock, or hear the clock strike, we know that the necessary parts are there and are properly connected. And in things having life, it is still more obvious, that a part often implies the whole. Thus blossoms or fruit on a tree presuppose a root, and vital sap, and tubes of living fibre, through which the sap circulates. Thus Paul speaks of the fruit, *not* fruits, of the Spirit: apparently meaning to suggest, that love, joy, peace, etc., do not exist separately and independently; but are vitally associated and actively combined, in the thoughts, and feelings, and life, of those who are born of, and led by, the Spirit of grace.

The fear of the Lord, is a phrase commonly used in the Old Testament, to express true godliness, as a principle in



operation. Under the Mosaic dispensation, any one who truly feared God, would be a pious Israelite; loving God's law, and keeping it. Under the Christian dispensation, the fear of God, is nothing less than personal Christianity, or the truth as it is in Jesus, believed, loved, obeyed, and enjoyed. He who, in a Christian country, is not himself *Christian* indeed, gives proof that he does not fear God sufficiently to *obey* Him in following Christ; that he dares disobey God in the chief things He requires. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." John xvi. 29.

Worldly and wicked men have a sort of *fear* of God, which is chiefly guilty dread. Thus Ahab *feared*, when he had heard the threatenings of the Lord by Elijah. And God said to the prophet, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me?" 1 Kings xxi 29. Such men fear God as the wolf fears the well-armed shepherd: but God's people fear him rather as the shepherd's dog fears his master, with a loving fear. He fears him; but at the same time draws nigh to him, and comes to his feet. He loves and obeys him; observes his voice, his eye, his hand; regards and follows all his directions.

Penitents have, at one and the same time, the spirit of bondage, the guilty fear; and the desire to please, with the fear of offending; the fear that follows sin; and the fear that restrains from it.

The fear of the Lord is a very broad, plain, and characteristic distinction of His people. The inhabitants of the world comprise these two separate and remarkably comprehensive classes,—those who fear, and those who fear *not*.

*Those that fear God*, is a description which includes true penitents along with believers. But a true penitent will hardly feel assured that his repentance is genuine and sincere, till he has the witness of the Spirit, with *his* spirit, that God has accepted and pardoned him.

The true and effectual fear of God is no man's natural disposition. It is a result of operations of grace. And the process of attainment is regular ; including *conviction*, of our natural and actual sinfulness ; a conviction wrought by the Holy Spirit, and yielded to with penitential feeling ; *repentance*, including contrition, amendment of life, submission to the government of God ; a *believing confidence*, a resolved and practical reliance ; which, as to the power, is the gift of God, while it is also the proper act of the penitent heart, trusting in the covenanted mercy of God, through the atonement and mediation of Jesus Christ. But there is too much reason to suspect, that some who profess to fear God, are deceiving themselves, in a manner, which in substance exemplifies the crude and corrupt notions of the heathen strangers, whom the king of Assyria transplanted from various countries to occupy the vacant lands and cities of the ten tribes in the kingdom of Samaria. They, the people of those nations, "feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children and their children's children ; as did their fathers." Thus many, it is to be feared, under the influence of servile formalism, submit to various kinds and degrees of restraint, and to burdensome observances ; but retain the idols of the heart, and are still fast bound in the chains of evil habits ; serving God in outward things, and being still essentially worldly ; lovers of money, lovers of pleasure, or slaves of fashion or custom.

Enslaved to sense, to pleasure prone,  
Fond of created good.

As really idolators in spirit, as the imported foreigners who were sent to occupy the country of the ten tribes. So great is the danger of self-deception, through "the deceitfulness of sin," and through the treachery of the evil heart of our fallen nature, which "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," and so insidious and malicious are

the devices of the adversary of souls, that those who take comfort in the consciousness, that they *fear God*, have need to "rejoice with trembling," and to be "jealous" over themselves "with godly jealousy," lest they should unwittingly be misled, in matters on which everlasting things depend. We have therefore need to pray, in the words of our sacred poet,

" Surround, sustain, and strengthen me,  
And fill with godly jealousy,  
And sanctifying fear."

The persons spoken of are those *that fear the Lord*.

II. Their MILITANT state is *implied*, by the words *encampeth* and *delivereth*. Those who need to be guarded on all sides by an encamping army, must be either in an enemy's country, or liable to be invaded by enemies ; those who are to be delivered must have been endangered.

Christians are warriors ; soldiers of Christ : they desire and "seek peace with all men," but in connexion with "holiness." They are constrained to be men of war, by the principles of duty and self-preservation.

Their enemies are of various orders, they exist in formidable numbers and are impelled by remorseless and implacable malignity. The usual classification of them, as the flesh, the world and the devil, is natural and comprehensive.

The flesh comprises our whole sad inheritance of spiritual depravity, in connexion with the appetites and infirmities of the body ; infirmities which are often the means, occasions, and instruments of dangerous temptations.

But worse than all my foes I find,  
The enemy within,  
The evil heart, the carnal mind,  
Mine own insidious sin.

My nature every moment waits,  
To render me secure ;  
And all my paths, with ease besets,  
To make my ruin sure.

By the *world* as an *enemy*, we understand all the external and material sources of temptation. The *things* of the world ; its joys and griefs, gain and loss, pleasure and pain, wants and gratifications ; the things which are seen and temporal : or, as John states and describes them, “ the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” The *men* of the world ; these are enemies in fact, though sometimes unconsciously ; even when they think they are befriending us. But worldly minds are naturally dangerous to the spiritually minded ; as persons who have the plague are dangerous to those who are in health. But there is often a willing and active enmity on the part of those who know not God, against those who truly *fear Him*. John says, “ marvel not my brethren, if the world hate you,” 1 John iii. 13, and he makes this remark after mentioning the murderous enmity of Cain, who slew his brother, “ because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” And a greater than John says, “ If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me, before it hated you : If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”

When the devil is classed with the flesh and the world, as among the Christian’s enemies, the singular number is used in a plural sense. From the avowal of a demoniac in the gospel, it appears, that these evil beings exist in formidable numbers. “ My name is Legion, for we are many.” From other parts of the Scriptures, as for instance, those which describe the calamities inflicted on the cattle, the children, and the person of Job, it seems evident that these fallen spirits are mysteriously mighty, and would overwhelm the victims of their malignity, if not restrained by divine power. They are also unspeakably subtle ; they study the characters of men, wield their passions and follies, suggest thoughts and motives, and lead sinners captive by

their vices, and habits of thought and feeling. They are remorselessly cruel; and will do all possible injury to those who fall into "the snare of the devil," and who "are taken captive by him at his will." If we had a human enemy who was able to live without sleep, it would seem rational to despair of guarding against such a foe: but these merciless adversaries *never* sleep. It was one of the superstitions of former days, to suppose that by certain magical arts, men might render themselves invisible, and it would appear hopeless to attempt any precaution against those who were believed to have such a marvellous power. But these evil angels are actually invisible, and inconceivably active and vigilant.

There have been instances in our time of the relief felt by nations, when some of the powerful oppressors and disturbers of the world have passed away; when the common feeling of multitudes has echoed the inspired strain, "How hath the oppressor ceased! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers." "The whole earth is at rest and is quiet." "How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken!"

But these invisible foes never die. They are immortal.

" From thrones of glory driven,  
By flaming vengeance hurled,  
They throng the air, and darken heaven,  
And rule the lower world.  
Angels your march oppose,  
Who still in strength excel,  
Your secret, sworn, eternal foes,  
Countless, invisible.  
With rage that never ends,  
Their hellish arts they try,  
Legions of dire, malicious fiends,  
And spirit's enthroned on high."

The resulting dangers are accordingly, various, frequent, harassing, formidable: though not literally perpetual, they are almost so; occurring in an irregular manner, and

involving assaults like those of enemies in ambush. The perils are incalculable and unspeakable.

If this were the whole case there would be no hope, no motive or encouragement to struggle: to despond would be rational. More than blood is spilt, if these adversaries prevail: more than life is endangered, if we give them any advantage: more than the ruin of an empire, more than the misery of a world through all time, is involved in the loss of a soul. But

III. The divine safeguard provided is described in terms which imply—that it is *powerful, permanent, complete, and efficacious*. It is—

1. *Powerful..*

The Angel of the Lord,—either the Angel Jehovah, the Son of God Himself, the presence of Him that dwelt in the bush, and led the hosts of Israel by the pillar of cloud; or one of the ministering spirits who attend the heirs of salvation.

One angel was able to destroy all the first-born of Egypt, and the seventy thousand who fell in the three days of pestilence, inflicted on account of the offence of David in numbering the people; and the hundred and eighty-five thousand of Sennacherib's army. It has been pointed out that the evil angels are mysteriously mighty, and able with God's permission, to do great and terrible things: and it is seasonable here to remark, that ministering angels, having *God's commission* are *mighty to save*. He

“Compasses with angel-bands,  
Bids them bear us in their hands.”

2. The defence is *permanent*. The Angel encampeth, as a guard, *not* passing only, but abiding.

When Jacob had parted from Laban, who “kissed his sons and daughters, and blessed them; and Laban departed, and returned unto his place. And Jacob went on his way,

and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host : and he called the name of that place, Mahanaim : " which is rendered in the margin, "two hosts or camps." A passage in Zechariah, preceding that which predicts the public entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, as "just and having salvation," says—"I will encamp about mine house, because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth ; and no oppressor shall pass through them any more." This is supposed to have been said in reference to the Maccabees, who, as a garrison, kept watch and ward, in defence of the house and people of God, in the perilous times of Antiochus Epiphanes. From their days, God preserved His temple—"till after the death of Christ : when He forsook it entirely ; choosing the Christian church for His temple, and making it His peculiar care to watch over, encamp round about, and protect it." To His Christian church, His parting assurance was—"And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

3. The defence is *complete*. This is pointed out by the words "*round about* ;" a defence on every side. The adversary and accuser of the brethren argued against Job, saying, "Hast not Thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side ?"

The same impervious hedge, of *Divine Providence*, is round about every child of God. "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked : but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about." When the Israelites went out of Egypt, "the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way ; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light ; to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people." Thus complete was the divine safeguard ; before or behind, by day or by night, as

their need required ; and the same supreme intelligence and power, is now devoted to the guidance and security of those who truly fear the Lord. When the king of Syria sent to seize Elisha in Dothan, the prophet's servant, having risen early, found the place surrounded with armed men ; and said to Elisha, "Alas, my master, how shall we do ? And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw ; and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." And, when the Syrians, who by night had surrounded the place, came forward to take him, again Elisha prayed, and said, "I pray Thee, smite this people with blindness." And he led them unresisting into the midst of Samaria. They were thus, by divine influence, deprived of opportunity to molest Elisha, and were placed at the mercy of the king of Israel. And He who has the safety of His servants in His hand, still uses His power over the minds of men ; so that, when they mean it not so, they are unwittingly made to do what the well-being, and the security of God's people require.

4. The promised safeguard is *efficacious* : for the sentence ends with the words, "and delivereth them." The defence is effectual. "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers ; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good ?" "Casting all your care upon Him ; for He careth for you." The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him ; He also will hear their cry and will save them." "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." Thus strong and full are the promises which assure true Christians of the love and care of their



God : and not more strong than true. You humble, fearful servants of the Most High, "Trust in the Lord for ever ; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

And you who do *not* fear the Lord, about you also there is an encampment,—round about you ; an entrenched, fortified encampment, of opinions, prejudices, passions, connexions, habits, associations ; that are worldly, vain, and unholy ; and among them and over them, are the powers of darkness, directing, controlling, and combining them ; to detain you as their captives, against the delivering power of grace and truth. O make haste to disannul "your covenant with death, and your agreement with hell," and surrender yourselves to Him "who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son : in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

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## THE PRAYER OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

“God be merciful unto us, and bless us ; and cause His face to shine upon us : That Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise Thee, O God ; let all the people praise Thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy ; for Thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise Thee, O God ; let all the people praise Thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase ; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us ; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.”—PSALM lxxvii.

THE venerable reformers of religion in England, about three hundred years ago, appointed this psalm to be read every Lord's Day, as a part of the evening service. This implies on their part, a high estimation of the importance and peculiar excellence of this psalm, and its appropriateness as the continual prayer of the people of God. They who thus appointed the reading of these words every Sabbath, whether the Reformers or their predecessors in earlier times, would appear to have been persuaded, that the spiritual vitality and prosperity of the church of the Redeemer are ordained to be the chief means in every age, of promoting the enlightenment, conversion, and happiness of the world : and they seem to have thought that—as one step towards the attainment of such blessings—prayer ought to be made without ceasing, for the mercies of God to His people, which alone can render them the suitable and effectual instruments of such comprehensive benefits to mankind.

The parts of this psalm are connected and arranged in a manner which is characteristically poetical ; not in that form and order, which would be observed in a deliberate investigation of the same subjects in prose ; but rather presenting the ideas and sentiments in such a spontaneous series, as would naturally arise, if the exalted imagination

and feelings of a religious mind were leading the illuminated understanding from means to ends; from the present, by the light of the past, to the mysterious future; from scene to scene of progressive social transformations and peaceful triumphs, terminating in universal godliness and blessedness, under the sceptre of Christ.

This order of poetical suggestion—of thought stimulated, expanded, and elevated by pure and lofty emotions—is in reality more natural than the logical order. But it is difficult to reduce to an arrangement convenient for methodical consideration, the contents of seven verses poured forth from the mind and heart of an inspired poet and prophet, with all the daring boldness of transition and repetition, which could be prompted by grandeur of thought, animated and intensified by the holiest and most rapturous feelings.

Though a plan can scarcely be devised which will adequately develop the entire subject, it may be useful to examine what the psalm presents for consideration, in the following order :—

Its obvious and closely connected parts are—

I. An inspired prayer of God's people, for the blessings most essential to their own true welfare ;

II. An appropriate statement of reasons for such prayer ; alleging, in substance, that the blessings sought are needful to the church in order to its highest usefulness.

III. The prayer and the reasons for it, afford the divine light and encouragement of a glorious and unerring example.

The *first* part is an inspired prayer of God's people for the blessings most essential to their own true welfare.

1. The text speaks in the *name*, and as the *voice* of the *collective people* of God. God be merciful unto *us*, and bless *us* :—*us*, God's people, whether the Israel of the times of Moses and the prophets, or the spiritual Israel, the church

of the Messiah among all nations ;—*us*, His saints, who have made a covenant with Him by sacrifice, presenting before Him the blood of atonement, as the indispensable means of a sinner's approach to the God of holiness, as the mutual pledge and seal of merciful kindness on the part of God, and of loving faith and obedience on the part of the humbled and pardoned people of God, who feel that they are not their own, being bought with a precious price.

2. The church, whether Jewish or Christian, asks, as the blessings indispensable to its own safety and happiness, for divine mercy, divine favour, and the manifested or sensible approbation of God.

“God be merciful unto us,” is a petition which implies confession of guilt and unworthiness, and humiliation on account of sin. The church of Him who gave Himself for us, and who justifies the ungodly, being penitent, through faith in His propitiation, has a far more impressive and affecting sense of its need of mercy, of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of the awful holiness of Him, who is “of purer eyes, than to behold iniquity” than its own members had, whether awakened or unawakened, while they were yet in their sins and in danger of the wrath to come. The work of saving grace is preceded by a deep sense of guilt and helplessness, and of the sinners unspeakable need of divine mercy ; and those who have personally obtained mercy, often feel like holy Daniel, who was apparently the best man of his time, when he “set his face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth, and ashes ;” and when, with no exception in favour of his own comparative righteousness, but unreservedly including himself with his fellow-captives in his confession and humiliation, he said, “O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned

against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him."

The next petition of the church in this inspired prayer is for divine favour: "God be merciful unto us, *and* BLESS us;" which is in agreement with the actual course of God's gracious dealings with all "who truly repent and unfeignedly believe the gospel." Whomsoever He *forgives*, He *blesses*; being justified, accounted righteous, they have peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. When He pardons a sinner, He does not merely remove the intolerable sense of His displeasure, and the fear of judgment, but He "*puts*" a "*gladness into his heart*" such as a prosperous worldling has not, *in the time when his wine and his oil increase*. And those who have thus "tasted that the Lord is gracious," value His blessing as their chief joy, and regard all the other enjoyments and advantages as utterly insufficient to compensate for its absence.

This prayer of the people of God goes on to ask, "*and cause His face to shine upon us*." Here there is probably an allusion to the visible glory of the Lord, which appeared on the tabernacle in the wilderness, and which filled the temple at its consecration, "so that the priests could not stand to minister." In other passages, the gracious presence of God is expressed by *the light of His countenance*. The witness of His spirit with their spirit is the shining of His face on the souls of His pardoned and adopted children; and the power of His Spirit accompanying the word and the solemnities of divine worship, with the blessing of His providence and grace on the institutions of His churches, and on the enterprises and exertions of their zeal and benevolence, are tokens to themselves and others, that He is with them, and that He accepts their work of faith and labour of love. The effect of such gracious manifestations on the hearts of His people is *sanctifying*, as well as animating; "with open face beholding," and

mirroring or reflecting, "as in a glass the glory of the Lord," they "are changed into the same image, from glory," in the effulgent Saviour, to reflected glory, in those who thus "see Him as He is," even by the Lord the Spirit, whose good pleasure it is thus gloriously to work in His people, "to will and to do."

3. These gracious gifts—the mercy and favour of God, and the tokens of His approving love, are the blessings most essential and indispensable to the church's own welfare. False and apostate churches are mainly anxious for a different kind of advantages. Wealth, political power, rank, splendour, great worldly influence, even the pomps and vanities of the world, are eagerly desired by individuals and communities who have fallen from grace, and have forsaken the fountain of living waters; and those churches, so called, which have most widely departed from the truth as it is in Jesus, are most ambitious of temporal advantages and honours. But a true church knows no substitute for divine forgiveness and divine favour, and for those tokens of divine approbation, by which God causes His face to shine upon His people. Possessing these, the disciples of Jesus are neither feeble nor afraid; but strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.

4. The prayer for these permanent blessings is inspired, expressing not only the church's wishes, but the "mind of the Lord" as to its real, and exact, and most important wants. Here "the Spirit" in the inspired word, "maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

II. The psalm sets forth an appropriate pleading of reasons for the church's prayer, alleging in substance that the blessings sought are needful to the church in order to its highest usefulness, in promoting the salvation of the world through the saving knowledge of God.

1. The granting of this prayer is urged as a *means* to an end,—not only as a favour to the petitioners, but as an

important stage in advance towards a greater purpose, a more glorious consummation—the world-wide spread of saving truth.

“That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.”

By “the way,” we understand the way in which God requires men to walk, the way of His precepts, the way of His truth, or the true religion; and in particular God’s revealed method of reconciling rebellious sinners to himself; justifying the ungodly, sanctifying the unholy, and preparing them for the glorious recompense of heaven.

By “thy saving health” we understand God’s medicine or remedy for the evils of our sick and dying humanity, for the otherwise helpless and dangerous state of a diseased, corrupted, miserable, perishing world; or in one word, his *salvation*, expressed in the preceding clause as *his way*; both expressions taken together, “signify the *way of salvation*.”

The blessings sought for the church are avowedly desired in order that God’s *way of salvation* may be known,—proclaimed, understood, and followed—“upon earth,” and “among all nations.” It is thus implied that this is the appointed and indispensable instrumentality for diffusing the saving knowledge of God. Thus is the world to be delivered out of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. The people of God, saved themselves, experiencing and exemplifying the religion of saving power, are to be the means of enlightening and saving others; and those who believe through their word and example, are to repeat the process; the purifying and saving influence is to be extended in human society, like the leaven in the measures of meal, till all know the Lord, and are witnesses that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The body of pardoned, blessed, approved believers, are thus the chosen instruments of divine opera-

tion; and the spiritual health and vigour of the church are required for the carrying out of God's plan for converting and saving the world. Believers are still, from the days of the patriarchs to the time of Christ, and to the latest generations, the salt of the earth, to preserve society from the most dangerous moral corruption; and the lights of the world to shine amidst the darkness of ignorance, error, and ungodliness, and by their good works to attract the notice, and disarm the prejudices, of mankind.

2. The *end* first proposed is then viewed as becoming, in its turn, a *means* to a further *end*. The knowledge of excellence is the rational ground of praise. In recognizing and applying this principle to the spread of the knowledge of Christ, and the happy and glorious results of this, the eager thoughts of the psalmist pass over some of the intermediate links of practical connexion—the effects of the gospel, in those who receive it; and through their influence, in confounding idolatry and all false religion; calling sinners to repentance, and diffusing a purifying and peaceful spirit everywhere: his anticipations go forward to the triumphant consequences on a large scale—the rich harvest of praise from a renovated world. “Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee.” Let these things be done, let these blessings be graciously bestowed on Thy servants, that through their willing instrumentality the people of all nations may *know* and *praise* Thee. Knowledge, as the ground of admiration, must precede praise, which is admiration expressed; and admiration of the character and ways of God must eventually be the effect of His people's borrowed light shining before men.

3. The stage of progress thus anticipated is then viewed as preparatory to a further happiness. A people who know God's way and walk in it; who receive His great remedy, His saving health; and live in the spirit of love



and praise; will submit to God's government. A saved people begin with grateful praise, and proceed with hearty, willing obedience. "And He will judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth" with order, peace, love, and wisdom; all laws and authorities in churches, states, and families, being regulated by the principles of His word, by His royal law of love to God and man; and the opinions and dispositions of men being pervaded and guided by the healthful spirit of His grace.

4. The universal concord and happiness of such a state of the world, under the sceptre of Christ, is contemplated by the psalmist as a cause of *solemn gladness* to all nations; as a reason for encouraging them to sing for joy; as calling for additional ardour and richer harmony of universal praise in the voices of great multitudes. "Let the people praise Thee, O God, let all the people praise Thee."

5. The union of converted and happy nations, in praising and serving God with their whole heart and with one consent, is then surveyed as a state of the world which He waits for, who "will wait, that He may be gracious." And it is exhibited, not indeed as a *cause*, but as a *condition*, of the removal of the curse, a restoration of the earth to general fertility, and of mankind to common abundance and temporal happiness, crowned with the blessing of the triune God on the happy and grateful inhabitants of a purified and renovated world. "Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the world shall fear Him." Some understand and interpret a part of these words as signifying God the Eternal Father shall bless us; God the Son, the Eternal Word, our own God, our Immanuel, shall bless us; God the Holy Spirit, who dwells in His people, shall bless us. Whether this be the meaning here intended or not, the fact will be so. The Father will forgive and bless those who come to Him

through His Son. The Son will give rest to their souls. The Holy Spirit will shed abroad in their hearts the love of God, and will dwell in them, and walk in them. Then will the earth yield the increase of the fruits of righteousness; all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of God, and will serve Him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.

III. The prayer and the reasons assigned for it, viewed together, afford the divine light and encouragement of a glorious and unerring example.

1. An *example*—the manner in which the ancient church thus called upon God is placed upon record, that their successors in all ages may walk by the same rule and mind the same things. This example sets before us the people of God feeling and praying as He would have them to do, and expressing their wants and desires in words which the Holy Ghost teacheth.

2. It is a *glorious* example which is thus set before us—the ancient church in Israel, rising in devout thoughts and holy desires to the elevation of its high calling, and joyfully anticipating the better times of the gospel; exulting in all that has been foreseen and accomplished down to our day, and rejoicing in the prospect of still greater triumphs when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

3. It is an *unerring* and a *perfect* example, because it was the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart and mind of the prophetic psalmist, inspiring thoughts, and wishes, and high hopes, worthy of the people of God when the Lord was great in Zion, and granting them glimpses of a more glorious dispensation to the churches of later times.

4. The psalm is a precious instance of the *light* which makes manifest. The telescope of prophetic sagacity here brings the far distant future near to the mind's eye of the thoughtful and devout reader. Days far better than our

own, times of advanced Christian enterprise and success, are set before us as in vision ; and the plans and operations of the victorious *agency*, by which the world is to be conquered for Christ, the blessed and blameless *means* and the triumphant and beneficent *consummation*, are discovered to the eye of faith, which receives the testimony of God as the evidence of things not seen.

5. The whole affords the most genial encouragement to those who pity the world, and who are jealous for the glory of Christ. The showers and sunshine of spring do not afford more gratifying promise of the glories of summer and the harvests and fruits of autumn. This psalm presents to the churches of every age and country animating motives, and ascertained results, such as may well sustain the fortitude of faithful men in the darkest times ; making it appear foolish to be weary in well-doing, and assuring those who pray and labour in patient hope, for the salvation of sinners and the reign of righteousness, that their labour will not be in vain in the Lord.

6. The use to be made of this divine light and encouragement thus set before us, should be to humble ourselves and pray earnestly, that God may be merciful unto *us* and bless *us*, and cause His face to shine upon *us*. We need these blessings for ourselves. And I trust we shall be willing to learn that it is our duty and glorious privilege, as the adopted children of God, to abound in all those works of the Lord, by which we may promote the salvation of all nations, and accelerate the period when God shall bless all nations with His truth and grace, and when all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.

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## MEN OF THE WORLD.

“Deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword ; from men which are thy hand, O Lord ; from men of the world, which have their portion in this life.”—PSALM xvii. 13, 14.

THE people of God have often been reproached for alleged illiberality, because they regard and speak of a large part of mankind *as men of the world*. The text sufficiently evinces that the phrase is scriptural, and that the numerous class of men it points out are not an imaginary race.

It was to me highly interesting, when this passage first fixed my attention, to perceive that this characteristic expression—*men of the world*—which some seem to regard as nothing better than sectarian phraseology, is a part “*of the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth*.” Those spiritual views of religion and worldliness which are now held by all true Christians, were the views of holy and inspired men thousands of years ago ;—in the days of Seth, Enoch and Noah ;—in the times of Abraham and his family, of David and of Christ. Genesis iv. 26. “And to Seth, to him also was born a son : and he called his name Enos : then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.” Chapter xx. 11. “And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place.” Chapter xxiv. 3. “And I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth.” Chapter xxvi. 34, 35. “And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri, the Hittite, and of Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite : Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah.”

John xv. 18, 19. “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world,

the world would love his own : but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Also John xvii. 14. In all these periods the comprehensive and accurate classification of mankind which the Holy Spirit taught and sanctioned, was not according to mere outward appearances, as the virtuous and the vicious; the moral and the immoral; or the honourable and the base; but according to more real and important distinctions—as sons of God and children of men; or as godly strangers and pilgrims and men of the world.

Respecting the sort of men here spoken of, the text leads us to consider

Their character—and

Their portion—

I. Their character.

They are spoken of as *wicked*.

These phrases do not describe two different sorts of men; but give two views or descriptions of the same persons.

The wicked are all *men of the world*, and all men of the world are *essentially wicked*. *Wicked—popularly*, such as are both irreligious and immoral;—*strictly* and *scripturally*,—such as are neither penitents nor believers,—such as neither trust, love, fear, nor serve God. They are men of the world *relatively* to the present and future; to the visible and the invisible; to things material and spiritual, or natural and carnal. *Men of the world*.

1. The elements or essential properties of this class of character. They *mind earthly things*—with a paramount and idolatrous regard. "To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress." "Who mind earthly things."

They *neglect* spiritual and heavenly things—are not living for eternity—though some try to "serve God and mammon."

Their views, habits, and manners, are *formed by and after the world*—by the things and the men of it—by the often reiterated impressions of worldly hopes, fears, and illusions—by the influence and example of the multitude whom they follow in doing evil—worldly training.

2. These essential elements are so differently combined with the special views, pursuits, and peculiarities of individuals, as to form many striking, and often contrasted varieties.

Some worldlings are avowed infidels, others party zealots. Some are despisers or neglecters of ordinances; others equally worldly, are punctilious and superstitious observers of ordinances. Some are immoral; others *mere* moralists. Some are elaborate formalists, hypocrites, or plausible professors, or ostentatious, sanctimonious bigots, who are *in the church on worldly principles*, for selfish objects: others openly profane.

Many are otherwise distinguished and varied from each other by such circumstances as—learning or ignorance—barbarous rudeness or fastidious refinement—wealth or poverty—sobriety or excess—frugality or profusion. The spendthrift and the miser are equally worldly. Some are fallen believers, backsliders in heart, thorny ground hearers.

There is in all the varieties of the worldly character, however diversified or contrasted, the *essential wickedness* of spiritual idolatry, impenitence, unbelief, and rebellious enmity against the character and claims of the God of holiness, the blessed and only potentate.

*Relatively*—to God and His people.

To *both* men of the world are *enemies*—in spirit and effect more than themselves are conscious of.

To good men they are often as *snares and nets*, as *adders* in the path, or *lions* in the way—as infectious sources of moral pestilence.

To God, notwithstanding their rebellious enmity, they are instruments, as a sword, or a hand, or a labourer. 1 Kings xi. 14. "The Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite." 23rd verse. "And God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah." 25 verse. "And he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, beside the mischief that Hadad did." 2 Samuel. "I will chastise him with the rod of men, and with stripes of the children of men." Isaiah liv. 16. "I have created the waster to destroy." xxxvii. 26. "Now have I brought it to pass that thou shouldst be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps, therefore the inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded," etc. Isaiah x. 15. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation." Jeremiah li. 20. "Thou art my battle-axe and weapons of war."

Between God and His people they are the subjects of *powerful prayer*. David here prays to be delivered from them. When, after numbering the people, the choice of three evils was offered him by God through the seer, David said "I am in a great strait: let me now fall into the hand of the Lord; for very great are His mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man." He had much and varied painful experience of the formidable and pernicious influence of worldly men. Saul, Doeg, Abner, Joab, Abishai, Ahithophel, Shimei, and others, were powerful or able men of the world.

Christian believers have *need* to be delivered

From the *power* of men of the world—as rulers, oppressors, persecutors.

From their *influence*—as acquaintances, relatives, friends. Adulterous friendship of the world is enmity with God.

From their influence as wise or crafty in their genera-

tion—as Ahithophel, against whose subtle sagacity David specially prayed.

From their poisonous spiritual influence *above all*—as worldly professors, wolves in sheep’s clothing—“Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence.”—Injury, from this influence, to God’s cause and people, is incalculable. Tares and wheat—well might Wesley say

“Men of worldly, low design,  
Let not these Thy people join,  
Poison our simplicity,  
Drag us from our trust in Thee.”

God CAN deliver from His own instruments, which are under command—He sets bounds to their power and rage—often breaks His rod, when the chastisement has been dealt.

What a terrible thing to the man of the world himself, to be first a scourge, a rod; *then* fuel for the fire of wrath unquenchable!

Awful is the case of him against whom God’s people are constrained to plead in true prayer! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

## II. *Their portion.*

“Which have their portion *in this life*”—*i. e.*, their portion of good—almost a part of their character—its chief consequence.

They *choose* and *have* their good in *this* life. (Refer to Bunyan’s *Passion and Patience*.)

*As* men of the world they *can have no other* share of GOOD than THIS world affords,—and it is their own choice. This was the essential wickedness of the rich man in the gospel, it was his choice and his great pleasure to be “clothed in purple and fine linen,” and to fare “sumptu-



ously every day ;” and when “in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torment,” and intreated the pity of his blessed and glorious forefather Abraham, the reply was, “Son, remember that thou in thy *lifetime* receivedst *thy good things*”—his whole portion of good. How poor when present and enjoyed ! how empty and desolate when spent and gone ! All that God *can* justly bestow on worldly men, *must* be given in *this* life—they prevent him from making them happy hereafter ; they put from them eternal life, and neglect the great salvation.

A poor portion it is which the best and happiest of them obtain !—food, drink, clothes, lodging, fire, and a few other conveniences—with laborious luxury, ostentation, foolish friends, position, fame, etc.—all !

A labourer whose honest toil earns wholesome necessities ; who has kind intercourse with his family, and a good character and conscience, enjoys more in *this* life, than the worldlings who, from the proud pinnacles of society, oppress or dazzle the multitude.

But most men of the world are *poor*, *obscure*, and *miserable* even in this life. The common lot is what we should chiefly consider, not the rare exceptions. A *poor* man of the world, is *poor* indeed !

The emphatic phrase, *in this life*, points by significant implication to the fact that there is *another* life. Men of the world have no portion of good *there*. But *that life* cannot be avoided—it comes as irresistibly as the morning comes to betray the unfinished enterprise of the thief. It comes—bringing to some unmingled good—to others unmixed, unmitigated misery.

Those who will have their good things *now*, will *then* have their evil things, and only evil. Miserable calculators—cheated by success—ruined by their own earnest choice and pursuits !

We *are*, or are *not*—men of the world.

Examine—

If you are not God's people,—repent—renounce the love of the world, or perish with your poor portion—look at and estimate your lot here and hereafter.

If you are children of God—watch against men of the world—pray to be delivered—say “Lord, I am Thine, save me.”

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## THE WILL OF GOD DONE IN EARTH AS IN HEAVEN.

“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”—MATTHEW vi. 10.

IT is an inestimable mercy that God has not only permitted us to pray, but has also graciously condescended to inform us what favours we may ask with a probability of obtaining them. He has thus rendered the privilege both definite and extensive. Had He only given a general permission to present petitions, without dictating or suggesting any, we might have doubted whether the privilege would not be nullified by the impossibility, in that case, of previously ascertaining what requests would be agreeable to His holy will. We might reasonably have feared lest many things, which our natural desires and wants would prompt us to ask for, should prove contrary to His will, ever unsearchable while unrevealed. But as He has placed before us a set of petitions, which He authorizes and commands us to present when we pray, we may, with lowly confidence, expect a favourable hearing of such requests as are included in the limits of those warranted or suggested petitions. And when the petitions thus authorised are duly considered and examined, they are found to be so comprehensive as to include all that can be reasonably claimed from divine mercy, bounty, or protection.

The Lord's prayer is not only a form, but a model of prayer; a directory concerning the subjects on which we may address the Almighty; an example of the manner in which we should order our hearts and our words before Him.

It is as needless, as it would be improper, to exalt one

part of this divine prayer at the expense of the rest : every part is highly instructive and important ; and the portion selected for our text is exceedingly full and weighty. (Jebb's reading—"Thy name be hallowed, etc., Thy will be done as in heaven so in earth.")

The points of view in which we propose to consider it may be conveniently expressed by the statement that it conveys instruction concerning the duty of prayer in particular ; concerning the comprehensive principle of all duty—our obligation to do the will of God ; and concerning the divine purposes as to the future triumphs of Messiah in the world. Or

I. The text is an important direction concerning prayer ;

II. It is, in substance, a comprehensive rule of Christian practice ;

III. It is an indirect prophecy or revelation, conveying religious information involving inspired views of the future.

I. It is an important direction concerning prayer.

1. Viewed as associated with *other petitions*, it expresses and enjoins *resignation*, as necessary to qualify and limit our wishes themselves, and the expression of them in supplication. The will of God is, *for our welfare*, infinitely better than ours.

“ Good when He gives, supremely good,  
Nor less when He denies.”

“ Should it be according to thy mind ? ”

This implied direction has the additional sanction of our Lord's example. “ And He went a little farther, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me ; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” He went away again the second time, and prayed saying, “ O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, thy will be done.”

2. Viewed as a request on our own behalf, *for favour to ourselves*, it teaches us to desire and ask for *righteousness*; for entire conformity to the will of God, for power to submit unreservedly to the dispensations of God's providence, and to "*do always those things that please Him.*"

In this consisted the moral perfection of Him whom the prophetic psalmist personates by saying, "*Lo! I come to do Thy will, O God,*" and who, as the Son of Man, did always those things that pleased Him. And the most simple idea we can have of the perfection of any creature is, that it *is*, and *does* what its Maker intended it to be and to do.

He has elsewhere taught that this righteousness, in connection with the spiritual kingdom of God, is *to be sought before all other good*.

3. Viewed in reference to its subject as a prayer concerning the will of God, for its universal prevalence, it is an expression of *zeal*. It teaches us to pray in a spirit of all-comprising zeal for God, and for His rights, honour, and authority. For the petition virtually asks Him to put forth the power of His glorious perfections in causing His will to be completely obeyed throughout the world, in putting down all rule, authority, and power that exalt themselves against His holy kingdom. He that prays thus makes a *profession to* the Almighty of zeal for His kingdom and glory.

4. Viewed as a prayer of intercession for *all the earth* (that is, all mankind; for "thy will be done in earth" is not understood by anyone to signify the inanimate, unconscious globe, the earth we tread upon; but must mean the intelligent and immortal creatures that dwell upon it: the earth *literally* is what God wills *it to be*; but its inhabitants rebel against the Lord of heaven and earth) viewed thus, as a prayer concerning the inhabitants of the earth, the text teaches us to pray in a spirit of GOODWILL towards men; that they may everywhere have the best blessing we

can ask for them, which is the wisdom, grace, and happiness to do constantly the whole will of God.

Other expressions in this prayer imply that we are to remember our fellow-creatures when we draw near to God. “*Our Father*”—“give *us*”—forgive *us our* trespasses.”

II. The text is, in substance though not in form, a comprehensive rule of Christian practice; or an instruction concerning the *principle of all duty*—that we are bound to obey the will of God.

1. The obvious intention of our Lord in teaching us to pray, is not chiefly to furnish proper *expressions* for our wishes, but rather to instruct us what our wishes ought to be,—what *things* it is right to desire and to request; but whatever it is right to *desire* and *ask*, it must also be right to *do* as we have power and opportunity. This direction how to pray implies that God’s will *ought* to be done;—that it is our duty *to bear, to perform, and to promote the whole will of God*: that we ought to desire it, to pray for it, to strive and labour for it. If we ought to ask it, it surely follows. that we ought to *desire* it, otherwise how could our petitions be sincere? If we are bound to *desire* any attainment or event, we are equally obliged to *strive* for it. It would be absurd and self-contradictory to say the contrary. Who could have the assurance to say concerning any supposed good that it was our duty to pray for it, but not to desire it? Or that it was our duty to desire it, but not to concur by our own patience or exertion to the attainment of our desire? And it would be no less absurd, if not impossible, to suppose a person sincere in prayer without correspondent desires; or to suppose him sincere in *desiring what he prays for*, but at the same time unwilling to do, or attempt what he desires and asks God *to cause* to be done.

2. By putting these words of supplication into our mouth, our Lord places us under a *peculiar obligation*, as

petitioners, to *strive after* the same things that we *pray for*, to use means suitable to the end which our petitions call for, in short to *work* as well as pray. We ought to do His will whether we pray thus or not;—but by thus praying we are additionally thus bound in consistency.

3. To allow a separation or an opposition between our prayers and our conduct, is practically a gross and shameful inconsistency: but such inconsistency, alas! there is in the practice of many.

How *many ask* daily that God's will may be done, who, when his will is before them in the shape of some disappointment or affliction, have *no patience*; but abandon themselves to occasional rage and habitual murmuring, and behave as if they thought the God of Providence dealt unwisely or unjustly!

How *many ask* daily that God's will may be done, who, when his will is before them in the form of some laborious or painful duty to be performed, or some cross to be taken up for Christ, *refuse* even to *attempt* an active obedience to that perfect will which they have so prayed for!

How *many*, by the habitual use of this prayer, ask God to accomplish that great spiritual reformation of the world, which is to render earth a holy and happy heaven below, who themselves take no pains, and contribute no cost to mend the world, or to reform or convert one human being! Such petitioners treat the Almighty as St. James's charitable man is represented to treat his poor brethren,—“be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?” In like manner, “what doth it profit” to say to the God of holiness, “Thy will be done,” if we neither endeavour to do it ourselves, nor make any exertion or sacrifice to do it in others? To act thus is at once hypocritical and profane; *hypocritical* in professing what is not sincerely felt; *presumptuously profane* in making such *false*

*profession* to the All-wise God, who searches the heart of His worshippers, and who says, "I know the thoughts that come into your mind, every one of them."

4. If we ask God to cause that to be done, which we are not willing to bear, to do, or to promote by any sacrifice or exertion, then we say to Him *mere words of compliment*, words which we do not mean. But if our prayers degenerate into compliments, we may expect to be answered accordingly. Such prayers are but wind, and if we *sow the wind* of unmeant petitions, we are likely to "*reap the whirlwind of indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish.*" Can any man mock God and go unpunished? "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*"

5. But if any of us are conscious of such inconsistency, what is to be done? Shall we therefore leave off praying as taught by Jesus Christ; or shall we alter our prayers? God forbid! It will avail nothing *to bring our prayers down to our practice*: we must, by grace, bring our practice *up* to our prayers. Some have been known to give up saying the Lord's prayer, because they would not *forgive*, thus blindly renouncing the terms of mercy, and abandoning themselves to unmitigated wrath. In like manner, to give up praying "Thy will be done," would be deliberate rebellion against God.

III. This prayer is an indirect prophecy conveying religious information respecting the future from the highest source. An instruction concerning the divine purposes as to the future prevalence of the will of God on earth.

1. From the highest source.

From Him, who in the beginning, as the Word was *with* God, and *was* God, who knew what was in man, etc.

It would be extravagant and presumptuous, to suppose that, in teaching us to pray, our Lord expressed His meaning too strongly, that He used ill-considered and inaccu-



rate phrases; or that He either carelessly, inadvertently, or designedly raised false expectations by the petitions He directed us to address to the Father.

2. By implication this prayer informs us

That the complete accomplishment of God's will *ought to be desired*, as a blessing to the earth, primarily and chiefly necessary to make it like heaven. He who teaches to pray undertakes to shew what is good or desirable.

This is the most needful and desirable blessing for the world. A repeal of the *curse of labour*, or of the *penalty of death*, would be nothing in comparison.

That a complete conformity to the will of God is a blessing *to be hoped for*, since we are encouraged to ask for it. Jesus knew the mind of God: therefore he knew either that God *was* willing to give the grace thus asked for, or that he was *not*. Who will dare to say that while Jesus taught His disciples to pray "Thy will be done," He was aware of the impossibility of this; that He bids them ask what He knew to be unattainable? Who will say that He would thus tantalise infirmity and dependence with useless directions and vain hopes, as a foolish nurse might urge a child to cry for the moon?

That conformity to the will of God is to be desired and hoped for *to this extent*. On this ground we may *hope* to be delivered from *all* sin. Sin is a transgression of the law, and the law is a manifestation of the will of God. Therefore if *His will be done, sin must cease*. And surely Christ would not *tantalise* us, by bidding us pray for what God had predetermined not to grant.

This appears further, as Dr. Clarke observes, from the phrase, "*as it is in heaven*," as angels do it, with all *zeal, diligence, love, delight, and perseverance*.

The words "on earth" imply that this deliverance from sin, and this conformity to the divine will may be hoped for in *this life*.

There is no need to pray for the accomplishment of the will of God in the world to come. Certainties are not the subjects of prayer, but such things as *may* or *may not* be. To pray that the will of God may be done in the *new* earth, would be as needless as to pray that the sun may rise to-morrow. As to ourselves we know not of any residence we shall have on earth beyond this life. For us to do the will of God on earth, it must be in *this* life or *never*. We pray to obey like angels *on earth*.

I know not what reasonable sense can be attached to these words, if a salvation from sin *in this life* be *denied*.

Surely the expectation, through grace, of serving God without sin, cannot justly be censured as enthusiastic and visionary with any consistency, except by such as would call the Saviour a visionary. Mark St. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians, "Now the very God of peace sanctify you *wholly*; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is obvious that those who pray to do God's will should seek to know it by searching the Scriptures, meditation, prayer, and sincere obedience to light possessed. Those who pray that God's will should be done on earth, should be willing to give of their substance to spread Christian knowledge and to support Christian institutions.

The great outlines of God's will are easily known in a Christian country;—that sinners repent, that penitents believe, that believers persevere, walking by the faith that works by love; watching and praying that they enter not into temptation; pursuing whatsoever things are honest, just, pure, lovely, laudable, virtuous. Do as you pray; "thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

## THE THREE CROSSES.

“ And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation ? And we indeed justly ; for we receive the due reward of our deeds ; but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”—LUKE xxiii. 39-43.

THESE words record a conversation which has no parallel ; between speakers characteristically remarkable, and in most extraordinary circumstances.

This singular dialogue may be considered as *one* subject in *three* parts. The one subject is the conversation of the sufferers on the *three* crosses. The three parts are—that of the *hardened* sinner, of the *penitent*, of *Jesus*.

We proceed to consider—

FIRST, that part of this ever memorable and eventful conversation which was uttered by the HARDENED SINNER.

Two malefactors, or evil-doers, were crucified with Jesus ; a circumstance tending, and apparently intended, to increase the public shame of His execution. “ And there were also two other malefactors, led with Him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.” This aggravated ignominy unwittingly fulfilled the prophetic words—“ He was numbered with the transgressors.”

“ And one of the malefactors which were hanged, railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us.”

No particulars of this man's personal history are given. The brutal character of mind and heart apparent in his conduct, presupposes a gradual process of debasement ; a

succession of vicious feelings and wicked actions forming settled habits of sinful indulgence, and of delight in evil.

Though all mankind are by nature sinful, it is by degrees that the character of impenitent and impenetrable hardness of heart is produced. Such enemies of mankind as Herod the Great and the emperor Nero were as harmless in the cradle as other infants. Temptations yielded to, and opportunities repeatedly and selfishly abused, made them the monsters they appear in their hateful history. It is so likely as to be almost certain, that this man's intensely malicious speech was the last in a long series of acts, by which his conscience was deadened, his mind polluted, and his heart hardened; a series including, as in the case of Herod or Nero, numerous instances of temptations yielded to and opportunities selfishly abused; each repetition deepening and extending the influence of evil on the entire character.

This man's dreadful situation combines misery and shame, aggravated by guilt, with the anguish of a death of slow torture. His words, and the dispositions which, in such awful circumstances, they reveal, are frightfully impressive. Abandoning himself entirely to evil, he appears to have been actuated by envy and hatred of that calmness of innocence which appeared in the suffering Saviour; and by a spirit of mocking unbelief and scoffing, malignant sarcasm, which strove to give envenomed pungency to his implied meaning. Denying Jesus to be the Christ, he reviled Him, as a poor, detected pretender. We see in this malefactor a man desperately wicked, who sought a gloomy satisfaction in insulting his meek and loving fellow-sufferer; giving his full sympathy to the cruel bystanders, and showing a horrible state of feeling, which excites in a thoughtful beholder, a struggle between pity for his extreme and hopeless wretchedness, and solemn abhorrence of his wilfully intensified depravity. His sarcastic demand was one of the most bitter of the human

infections the blameless goodness of Jesus endured on the cross. The taunts this railer took up from the chief priests with the scribes and elders, had a keenness from *his* lips more pungent than from theirs, malignant as they were.

His perdition—within sight and hearing—even at the side of his Saviour—at the very time when for himself the atoning penalty was suffered, has an awful prominence amidst the many and mighty woes of our guilty race. Its causes were apparently the same which account for unnumbered hopeless wrecks of souls at the very mouth of the harbour of refuge; unrepenting, unbelieving, and reckless neglect of the means of salvation, throughout the day of grace, till the *Spirit* who will not always strive with man, reluctantly gives the obstinate sinner up.

We have to consider—

SECONDLY, that part of this singular and momentous conversation which was spoken by the PENITENT MALEFACTOR.

“But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And *we* indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom.”

This penitent's words present for consideration—his *case*, his *reply* to his fellow-sinner, and his *appeal* to Jesus.

#### 1. His CASE.

He, as well as the other, was miserable and guilty. His own words briefly present his case, without reserve or excuse. At the time of this conversation there was a great disparity between him and his fellow sinner, which can only be accounted for on general and probable grounds. Matthew and Mark make no distinction between the two.

They appear to speak as human witnesses of what they personally saw and heard. Matthew, after mentioning the sarcasms of the chief priests with the scribes and elders, says, "The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth." And Mark says, "And they that were crucified with Him reviled Him." Some learned divines think these evangelists put the plural for the singular, "as the best authors sometimes do." Perhaps during those dreadful hours, the attention of the anxious, deeply-dispirited disciples was so entirely occupied and absorbed with the astounding sufferings of their master, that they did not quite apprehend the whole case of the two malefactors. Luke, who wrote somewhat later, "of those things which," he says, "are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word," and who also claim to have "had perfect understanding of all things from the very first,"—proceeds, in his account of these events, to relate some important circumstances which, it seems, Matthew and Mark had not distinctly observed, or minutely investigated, or fully understood *at the time*, when the facts were taking place. Perhaps no one human witness would be able, at such a distracting crisis, amidst a restless and excited crowd, to see and hear and understand every thing that was said and done. The fact was, as it appears on putting the three accounts together, that both of the thieves were heard challenging Jesus' power to save them, but with the widest difference of meaning; which Luke's account, supplementary, but not contrary, to the others, points out.

In those evil times, authority was often exercised with great harshness and violence; and many were thus made desperate, and goaded by intolerable oppression to break the laws of society. Without such a continuously criminal course of life as would have produced habitual hardness of

heart, the penitent malefactor might have so far transgressed, through recent and strong temptation, as to incur the extreme penalty of the Roman law. Or if his heart had been previously hardened, it was now softened by the good Spirit of Him, whose mercy takes loving and tender advantage of the yielding moments of a sinner's heart, so that "the worst need keep him out no more, nor force him to depart." By some means at some time in his previous course as a transgressor, he had been led to consider his ways, and to submit himself to Him who declares, Ezekiel xviii. 28, "Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die." xviii. 30, "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions: so iniquity shall not be your ruin." 32, "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." The particulars of this penitent's history are not before us; but according to the declared principle of divine dealings, such a change of mind as we have supposed, must have been wrought in him, before those fruits of grace could be produced, which marked his dying hours.

2. The REPLY of the penitent to his fellow-sinner, is incompatible with the supposition—that *he* also had at first joined in railing. "But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss." This was a master-piece of proper reproof; mild, serious, rational, humble, penetrating to the conscience; quite free from those airs of superiority in the reprover which so frequently counteract well-meant admonitions, by rousing to self-defence the pride of the person reproved. He speaks to the same effect as if he had said—Hast thou, in this terrible situation, no fear of God whose

awful presence is now brought so near to us, and before whom we must almost immediately stand ; as thou also art even now enduring the pains which will slowly, but surely, bring the death to which we are appointed? He thus puts himself on a level with the other ; softening rebuke with frank confession and unreserved humiliation. As the occasion of this reproof was the other's reviling of Jesus, he, on the contrary, avows his conviction of the innocence of their mysterious fellow-sufferer. The penitent might have been present in the judgment-hall, as a prisoner awaiting his doom, so as to have learned that Pilate answered the clamours of the accusers of Jesus, by asking—"Why, what evil hath He done?" and by declaring that neither he nor Herod had found any fault in Him. This penitent might on some occasion have heard our Lord in the course of His public ministry, and have witnessed some of His miracles.—He might thus have been satisfied that Jesus was indeed the Christ. The offence for which, as he confesses, he was justly punished, might have been committed before he thus believed, or afterwards through unfaithfulness; but, for any thing we know to the contrary, he was a penitent before he was crucified. In the midst of his torments, while he acknowledged the justice of his own condemnation, he vindicated the innocence of Jesus. He showed himself anxious, *not* for the preservation of his life; for *that* he did not ask; but for the salvation of his soul; and for the salvation also of his fellow sinner; whom he so charitably warns, and so kindly invites to prepare to meet God. However and whenever his repentance began, it brought forth "fruits meet for repentance," and "answerable to amendment of life." And whatever he had previously been convinced of concerning Jesus as the CHRIST, was confirmed by all he saw in the incarnate SON, Son of David, and Son of God, the mysterious GOD-MAN, on the CROSS.



3. The penitent's APPEAL to Jesus. "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom."

This appeal, few as the words are, has wonderful fulness of meaning. It implies an extent and a spirituality of views concerning Christ *as a King*, to which the disciples of Jesus had not *then* attained. It presupposes an extraordinary faith: a faith which discerned and acknowledged the rights and powers of Jesus *as a King*, in His darkest hour; which openly submitted to His spiritual sceptre, and invoked the protection of His regal majesty, when He appeared least like a king; which avowed solemn reliance on His saving power when His disciples were dismayed and confounded; which amidst a blaspheming multitude honoured Him as the LORD, when His apostles were afraid to own Him; which recognised Him as the king of a boundless and eternal dominion, at the very time and place in which the title *King of the Jews* was placed in mockery over His crown of thorns; a faith which asked immortal gifts from HIM as "the blessed and only potentate," when He was languishing in apparent helplessness and mortal pain, on that "shameful tree" which His sacrificial death has made honourable and glorious. The penitent asked a far greater thing, in earnest faith and hope, than his obdurate fellow-sinner demanded in incredulous scorn. Both malefactors took up the sayings of the bystanders; but with a completely opposite application. He who railed, said, "If Thou be Christ," *derisively*; meaning, that if Jesus were not, as the railer deemed, a self-deluding pretender, He would have had power to avoid the cross, or miraculously to quit it. *He* interpreted Jesus' non-resistance as evincing a want of power; and, with bitter irony, called on Him to deliver Himself and His fellow-sufferers. The *other*, with contrite humility, appealed to His kingly power, as the Christ, *believingly*, as to a power extending, with

supreme and boundless dominion, beyond life and death, into the inscrutable realm of the unseen and the everlasting.

What the particulars of the penitent's life had been may not be made known to us till we also enter that mysterious region ; but, considering his pious deportment on the cross, his faithful use of precious opportunity, his full avowal of faith and hope in Jesus, it seems almost profane for procrastinating worldlings to excuse their presumptuous delays by classing themselves with this dying confessor of a dying Saviour.

The sacred history being silent concerning any particulars of the former life of this man, whose end was so remarkable, the actual details cannot be supplied ; but the manner and circumstances of his end being so eminently and suggestively characteristic, it may be permitted us to reason cautiously backward from what is known to what is possible, respecting some slight and general indications of his previous course and his mental habits.

The close reasoning, the moral force, and the godly principle of his remonstrance to his fellow-sinner would not have been inopportune or unlikely on the part of a well-instructed Jew, a diligent attender of the synagogues, a reader or a thoughtful hearer of the law and the prophets, all which this penitent might have been before he did the acts for which he was suffering. Our judicious commentator, Benson, remarks that "the word rendered *malefactor*, does not always denote a *thief* or a *robber* ; but was a term likewise applied to Jewish soldiers who were hurried by their zeal to commit some crime in opposition to the Roman authority." But whether the offence of this man was an act of robbery, or only some disorderly violence of zeal against the abhorred Roman power, *he* sets up no plea of comparative harmlessness ; but simply confesses that he was justly punished.

Respecting him who reasoned so well, as well as Nicodemus might have done, concerning himself and his fellow-sinner, concerning the blameless innocence of Jesus, and concerning His predicted kingdom ; the circumstances would prompt a question, for the answer to which we must wait, namely, Did he *apprehend* that Jesus, the meek, majestic sufferer at his side, was actually the very king proclaimed in the second Psalm, as the LORD'S ANOINTED, whom kings of the earth, rulers, and peoples vainly set themselves to oppose and resist : that HE was, as the evangelist, John, declares (John xii. 41) that same glorious and awful Lord whom, in vision, Isaiah saw in the temple, sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, when the posts of the thresholds trembled at the voices of the seraphim, who cried one to another, and said, holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts : that HE, though then numbered with the transgressors, was the same mysterious and mighty being whom Nebuchadnezzar saw, with the three friends of Daniel in the furnace, when the astonished king said, "Lo, I see *four* men, loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God : " the same Being also, of whom Daniel says, "I saw in the night visions (Daniel vii. 13, 14) and, behold, one like the Son of Man *came with the clouds of heaven*, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him : his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not be destroyed." On the day before that in which He was crucified between the malefactors, He had been questioned by the high-priest, because to the words of the false witnesses he answered nothing. "Again the high-priest asked Him, and said unto Him, Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the blessed ? And Jesus said, I am : and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in

the clouds of heaven." (Mark xiv. 61.) By this answer, Jesus claimed to be *that* Son of Man, who was seen by Daniel in vision; as coming with the clouds of heaven, and receiving universal and everlasting dominion. For this penitent to be enabled to reason, to discern, and to speak, as he did on the cross, he must have been assisted in an extraordinary measure by the Holy Spirit, of whom Jesus said, "He shall glorify Me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you."

Fully thirty years before these events—the most momentous since the fall in Eden—it was matter of public notoriety, that *wise men from the east* came to Jerusalem, enquiring, "Where is He that was born king of the Jews;" that Herod the Great, hearing of their enquiries, "was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;" and the chief priests and the scribes, being consulted on the question—where Christ should be born, answered by quoting the words of the prophet Micah, chapter v. And, as it was foretold, HE, who between the two malefactors, was then enduring mysterious and tremendous agonies, had been born in Bethlehem Ephratah, and came forth to be ruler in Israel; HE, whose "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting;" and who "shall be great unto the ends of the earth."

If by the Holy Spirit, these things were vividly brought to the remembrance and strongly impressed on the heart of him who said, "Lord remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom," his reverence and his devout confidence would be well accounted for. But whether this dying confessor thus remembered and apprehended these things or not, *such were* the facts. He whom the penitent had faith to acknowledge as the Lord of a kingdom to come, *was* the same Son of God and glorious king announced in the psalms; seen by Isaiah enthroned in

the temple; by the fierce king of Babylon in the fiery furnace, by Daniel in the night visions, as one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven; and predicted by Isaiah (ix. 5) as "the mighty God, the Father of the everlasting age" (Lowth) the founder of a new and perpetual family of God, and kingdom of grace.

We have to consider

THIRDLY, that part of this momentous conversation, which consists of the SAYINGS OF JESUS.

From the torturing cross, on which He hung by His wounds, Jesus replied like a king, "king of righteousness, and king of peace:" the mediatorial king, to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth. (Matthew xxviii. 18.) His answer to the penitent confessor of His divine royalty, disposed of a greater boon than all the kingdoms of the world. "Verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." These gracious words include the forgiveness of sin; and would at once impart the peace of God to the believing soul of the penitent, who does not appear to have said anything more. It was not a time for needless remark. To speak at all must have been extremely difficult and painful. He had still much to endure; a long-drawn agony. But he had received strong consolation; assured that his sufferings would end with the day; and would then give place to sweet and eternal repose. He had but to bear his remaining pangs, with glorious peace in his soul, Christ at his side, and paradise in his mind's eye.

2. In granting the prayer of the penitent, Jesus speaks a significant word concerning Himself, "To-day shalt thou be with *Me* in paradise." Who but *He* who spake "as never man spake," could in so few words have conveyed so much clear and happy meaning? From His words, as from what He says of the beggar Lazarus, we have the

precious information, that the souls of those who so believe in Him that they “die in the Lord,” enter at once into perfect rest.

“ Who trusting in their Lord depart,  
Cleansed from all sin, and pure in heart,  
The bliss unmixed, the glorious prize,  
They find with Christ in paradise.”

The words of Jesus imply that HE went from the cross to the abode of departed saints, in the spiritual world, or paradise; carrying to glorified patriarchs and prophets, the news and the trophies of *redemption accomplished*.

3. The hardened sinner did not perish through any impossibility of being saved; but through neglect of his last precious opportunity. To him Jesus gave no answer. He had been sufficiently, wisely, and kindly answered by his fellow-sufferer. His heart and conscience seem to have been inaccessible. He was self-abandoned.

In answer to him, and to all the railers, Jesus could have done all he was challenged to do. As the true Christ, He had all, and more than all, the power He was challenged to put forth. Had it pleased Him so to do, he could in a moment have overwhelmed His enemies; either with easy and silent manifestations of power; as in the instance John mentions in the garden;—“as soon then as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward and fell to the ground;”—or with such terrors of the Lord, as will attend Him, when He, as “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him.” But, as He said, a few days before to Peter, in the garden, “How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” In the sufferings which filled His accusers with exultation, and His disciples with dismay, there was a mystery which neither foes nor friends could interpret. HE, “Christ Jesus, came into the world to save sinners.” As the Lamb

of God,—the Lamb provided by God Himself at JEHOVAH JIREH, according to Abraham's prophetic saying, for the great sacrifice,—He yielded Himself unresistingly to all the inflictions His stupendous enterprise required of Him, "who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

By His atoning sorrows, He had rendered an equivalent for the penalty of the world's transgressions, when—"it was exacted, and he was made answerable." The Lord made to light upon him, "the iniquity of us all;" when, "as a Lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb; so he opened not his mouth, though by an oppressive judgment he was taken off." Though, "he had done no wrong, neither was any guile in his mouth, yet it pleased the Lord to crush him with affliction." (Lowth.) By his accepted sacrifice, he became "the propitiation"—"for the sins of the whole world." When therefore he graciously answered—"Verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise:" His word of power would impart peace: the peace of God the *inward kingdom*, of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, to the dying confessor of his dominion, who had obtained his promise, and was immediately to follow him, and to be with him in paradise.

Let us learn to dread and to avoid the hardness of heart to which procrastinating worldliness leads; endangering the soul to the uttermost, and threatening it with hopeless and endless ruin.

Let us learn to *act* like the penitent, in using present opportunities; in coming unreservedly and immediately to Him who receiveth sinners *still*; who is Jesus, the Saviour *still*; present as the GOD-MAN, with divine attributes and human sympathies combined in one Christ, at the side of every penitent, who humbly and sincerely trusts in Him

having "all power in heaven and in earth," as the mediatorial king; and "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

He shewed himself gracious to hear and "mighty to save," even in his hour of languishing weakness and mortal pain; ready, amidst His own agonies, to give effectual attention to the prayer of a contrite spirit. How much more probable, according to human apprehension, that He should now hear and save, *on the mercy-seat*, to which the right hand of God has exalted Him, where He ever liveth, in His immortal manhood, to make intercession for us; and where, as the eternal Son of God, HE is our mighty intercessor, "who is the blessed and only potentate, the king of kings, and lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting." Amen.

Note. By the gracious dealing of our Lord with the penitent, what impressive exemplification is given of sayings—already gloriously emphatic—in the psalms and the gospels, which speak of *tender* mercy, and of *loving* kindness. The father of the baptist says, in his inspired testimony, "to give knowledge of salvation to his people by remission of their sins, through the *tender* mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us." The spirit of many passages in the Psalms is breathed in that prayer of David, "Withhold not Thou Thy *tender* mercies from me, O Lord; let Thy loving kindness and Thy truth continually preserve me." The mercies men extend to their fellow-creatures are often wanting in tenderness; and the kindnesses they bestow are too frequently tainted with some unpleasant savour of ostentation, or of calculating and far-seeing selfishness: but the Lord's mercies are *tender*, and His kindness is *loving*.



I have heard it said by good men of long experience and wise discernment, concerning a great preacher and learned theologian, whose praise was and is in our churches, who passed to his reward above forty years ago, and who was owned of God as the herald of mercy to many souls; that, with all his wonderful pathos and persuasive skill, in setting forth the saving truth, there was about him a methodical rigidity, as well as an habitual godly jealousy of erroneous doctrine and of the deceitfulness of sin, which sometimes led him to surround his statements of gospel-truth with so many strict guards, and systematic distinctions, that, as they expressed it, he seemed to make the "exceeding great and precious promises," *too hot to be taken hold of* by a timid and trembling sinner. Not so did Jesus deal with the penitent malefactor.

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## ON CONSCIENCE,

VIEWED IN CONNEXION WITH PRACTICAL JUDGMENT.

DELIVERED, IN SUBSTANCE, TO SEVERAL WESLEYAN MINISTERS AND  
MISSIONARIES, ON OCCASION OF THEIR DEPARTURE TO  
VARIOUS PARTS OF THE WORLD.

“And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.”—ACTS xxiv. 16.

ALL persons who are sincerely and intelligently religious must have an unfeigned and profound respect for brethren who, in a spirit of Christian zeal and self-sacrifice, have devoted their lives to the missionary department of our work. The love of Christ will constrain us to honour the high and holy motives which have determined them to leave behind the manifold advantages of advanced Christian civilization in their native land; and to encounter the unknown hazards and exhausting labours, and to endure the privations, of a residence among savage or semi-barbarous tribes. Especially must we respect ministers who repeatedly go forth to such difficult and trying enterprises: and when we look at the noble elements of character which such undertakings require and presuppose, we shall feel little disposition to obtrude advice on a class of men whom, for their work's sake, we so greatly honour. And those who have already laboured in the foreign field possess, as the result of personal experience and observation, a knowledge of many particulars, which we, who stay in England, can but understand and appreciate in a vague and general manner. Such considerations tend to disincline us from any line of remark which is not chiefly of a general nature, such as the scenes of home-observation may enable us to venture upon,

without “stretching beyond our measure” into “another man’s line.”

When we endeavour to place ourselves mentally in the positions occupied by our foreign missionaries, that which we perceive most impressively is,—*that they need at once the highest degree of pure and elevated conscientiousness, and the aptitudes of a sound and ready practical judgment.*

Any person who can, even imperfectly, realize the peculiar circumstances of their various spheres of labour, whether amidst the ancient and deeply corrupt and polluted civilizations of the East, amongst the Pagan barbarians of Africa, or the cannibal tribes of the Polynesian islands, considering that the missionaries are in many instances separated by distance from European brotherhood and counsel, and have often to deal alone with restless, fickle, fierce, and faithless natives, whom early associations and immemorial habits have made callous and shameless on many subjects from which the Christian mind instinctively recoils; considering also that on some occasions our brethren are called upon, by pressing necessity, to decide and to act without human counsel, without complete information, amidst complications of fraud and danger; considering these things, any person who but imperfectly estimates the perplexities and emergencies in which they are liable to be placed, will be disposed to admit that—still more than those who minister in such a country as ours, and whatever other qualifications may be dispensed with—they need, in a very eminent degree, those which have been mentioned,—a pure and elevated conscientiousness, and the aptitudes of a sound and ready practical judgment.

It is easy to put together the words and phrases which express these important qualifications; and, when they are distinctly expressed, most persons will find little difficulty in forming a clear, general conception of them; but to

produce them in living reality, and much more to secure them in actively working combination, are achievements of great magnitude and rare felicity. Yet to realize and combine them ought to be less difficult than it is usually found to be. For the grace of God can enable every Christian to be *universally conscientious*; and *practical judgment* is probably one of the most improvable of mental qualifications. The small progress usually made in this respect has apparently a moral cause:—the quality of clear and sober judgment is not brilliant and dazzling; it is not adapted for display; it does not feed vanity, nor stimulate ambition; it is therefore not earnestly and generally cultivated; and is, consequently, but rarely attained.

Other reasons of a moral nature might be adduced to show why the attainment of practical judgment is usually so slow and limited. There are large classes of subjects respecting which persons of small abilities,—if stimulated by interest, and placed amidst frequent opportunities of exercising such judgment as they have,—do acquire a quick and sure discernment of the qualities and conditions of those things about which they are concerned; and, in the facility and certainty of such discernment, they excel persons of greater mental power, whose attention has been rarely given to the things in question, and who have mostly felt little or no interest in them.

In such matters as the material, texture, and finish of a piece of woollen cloth, a clothier, woollen draper, or tailor, of common mind, can decide more quickly and correctly than a person of high faculties, who has neither the requisite familiarity with the article, nor the constantly-recurring motive of a personal interest in judging carefully and avoiding mistakes. The same principles equally apply to the difference between the opinions hastily given by clever townsmen about soils, and crops, and farming stock, and the knowledge actually possessed by most of the rude

tillers of the ground, towards whom the urban critics are inclined to be supercilious. The citizens, in such cases, are often mistaken, and the rustics right; because, in the matters spoken of, such judgment as the men of the field are capable of has been often and carefully applied; while, as to the same things, the ready-witted and free-speaking townsmen have had neither occasion nor motive for frequent and earnest observation.

In questions of morals and of general prudence, that feeling of personal interest, which sharpens dull faculties concerning things involving gain or loss, is not only often wanting on the side of truth and right, but is too often enlisted on the wrong side. The right judgment which many persons cannot avoid having in some degree, is, like conscience, reluctantly listened to; and, on various pretexts, put aside, evaded, and practically frustrated. Sound judgment and religious self-denial are, though on different grounds, equally opposed to the excesses of passion and appetite, and wayward self-will, and to the illusions of vanity and ambition. They are, therefore, equally counteracted by the habits of thought and feeling which those men love to indulge who are too selfish, sensual, covetous, proud, passionate, frivolous, or vain to learn the wisdom that *dwells with prudence*.

The book which teaches that, considered *intellectually*, true religion is wisdom; *morally and experimentally*, faith working by love; *practically*, the keeping of God's commandments; also complains and expostulates in a manner which implies—that men *might have* better judgment if they would, that they *ought* to have it, and that their want of it is *without excuse*. In the first chapter of the Proverbs, sinners are reproached and threatened—"For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall

dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." The following passages presuppose that wisdom, which is the highest judgment, may be obtained by the simple and ignorant, if they are willing to receive instruction. "Ponder the path of thy feet, and all thy ways shall be ordered aright." (Proverbs iv. 26, margin.) "Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?" "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart." "All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge." "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me." (Proverbs viii. 1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 17.)

The dependence of the judgment on moral influence is apparent in the fact—that some pleaders at the bar, who have been pre-eminently judicious in discerning and managing all the elements of success in conducting a cause, have been as conspicuously defective and erroneous in the conduct of life. They were steadily bent on winning causes, and thereby gaining fame and wealth, and the *interest* they felt in their *ends* guided and strengthened their judgment in the choice and use of suitable means; but they were not in earnest about living well, and neglected the only sure means of so doing. It is notorious that multitudes, who avoid the extremes of vice, have opinions and prejudices to the effect—that humility, patience, meekness, and prudence are marks of a spiritless character. They admire impetuous, fiery energy, and have more sympathy for the gloomy desperation of a Red Indian, chanting his fierce death-song, than for the Christian virtues of childlike obedience and hopeful resignation. For such persons to have good judgment, would be more surprising than that they should be

examples of the want of it. The unerring and eternal wisdom gives such precepts as—"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty." "Only by pride cometh contention." "When pride cometh, then cometh shame : but with the lowly is wisdom." "As wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife." "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin." "He that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly." (Proverbs xvi. 32 ; xiii. 10 ; xi. 2 ; xxvi. 21 ; x. 19 ; xiv. 29.) "Wherefore, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." (James i. 19.) To expect sound judgment from those who, even as professors of religion, disregard these great principles, and who are not ashamed to be froward, peevish, perverse, vindictive, or vain-glorious, would be to look for "grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles."

An able foreign agent of the London Missionary Society, stated in a recent meeting of one of its auxiliaries, that a missionary in India, as far as usefulness and efficiency were concerned, might almost as well be without piety as without prudence. And the judicious Doddridge, whose "Lectures on Preaching, and the several branches of the Ministerial Office," contain precious treasures of good counsel, advises a young minister respecting certain "substantial and intelligent persons in a congregation" to "endeavour not only to secure the affection, but the reverence of such. This," he says, "can only be done by a prudent and steady conduct, and by solid and strong sense, both in the pulpit and in conversation. Beware they do not think you a weak, but well-meaning man." "To those who are disaffected to your person and ministry, be not sharp-sighted to see it ; and when it is so plain that it cannot be overlooked, if they are good men, talk over the affair mildly with them, and endeavour to effect a reconciliation if possible ; and if that cannot be done, dismiss them with as good a testimonial, as to their character, as

their case will bear. If they are vicious men, be still, till an opportunity offers of exposing and overbearing them at once." These extracts show how highly that eminent man valued and cultivated practical judgment.

But no abatement can be made from the phrase,—universally conscientious. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him." (Prov. iii. 6.) "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven : but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. v. 19.) "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor. x. 31.) "And herein" (that is, in his hope toward God) "do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." (Acts xxiv, 16.) Whenever, or wherever, moral right or wrong can be done, there is something for the conscience to deal with.

Some of the perplexities of many conscientious persons arise partly from the ambiguities of current phraseology, and partly from their own careless and inaccurate use of words, especially those by which subjects of a moral or mental nature are expressed. Not a few persons talk of their "conscience" or their "principles," when they really mean their "notions," or their "opinions," or even their "prejudices." Sometimes this exchange of terms is a rhetorical artifice, intended to obtain for their notions or opinions, the respect due only to their conscience or their principles. But, not seldom, those who use these words interchangeably, *impose upon themselves*; and feel bound to be as stiff and impracticable in standing by their mere opinions, as if they were vital principles, or plain and genuine points of conscience.

A young man, more than fifty years ago, mentioned to the excellent Minister who gave him his first Methodist



ticket, a matter which he took to be a point of conscience, and on which he was somewhat anxious and doubtful. His Minister answered to the effect, that a tender conscience was a very excellent and necessary thing; but that a *scrupulous* conscience was a very perplexing and troublesome thing. He evidently used the word *scrupulous* in the sense given in the dictionaries,—“nicely doubtful, hard to satisfy in determinations of conscience; given to objections, captious.” We think we have seen many exemplifications of both parts of that Minister’s observation. And we have a notion that *weak* and *scrupulous consciences* are commonly found in connection with a *feebleness* or a *want of judgment*. Were we requested to describe a crotchety character, we should say that, in a good man, its usual elements are,—a narrow understanding, a stiff temper, a suspicious imagination, and a *scrupulous* conscience.

“Dubius is such a *scrupulous* good man,—  
Yes—you may catch him tripping if you can,  
He would not, with a peremptory tone,  
Assert the nose upon his face his own.”\*

Yet the poet himself so caught Dubius tripping, as to be moved to make his ludicrous excess of punctilious care the occasion of this pungent remark; which, like an instantaneous photograph, preserves for our use, the very lineaments, the character, manner, and expression, as they impressed the discerning observer, and were transferred to his enduring page. No doubt the person, thus vividly sketched by a few master-strokes, was one of Cowper’s actual acquaintances in the last century. If he has any descendants now living, they may be thankful that no clue is given by which their ancestor’s proper name can be discovered. For the eye of genius, like that of the fabulous Medusa, or of the angel who saw Lot’s wife

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\* Cowper.

looking back, fossilizes what attracts its formidable glance.

To us, who know not who Dubius was, he represents a large class, who, by their mistakes and affectations as dunces, or their tricks as pretenders, do much to cause a good and necessary thing,—*an indispensable good*,—to be lightly esteemed, and rashly spoken against. Men who, like Dubius, exhibit conscientiousness apart from good sense, and in the degrading company of folly, not only make themselves ridiculous, but cause even their “good to be evil spoken of,” and tempt the undiscerning many to regard conscientiousness itself with suspicion or contempt.

But—

“If white and black blend, soften, and unite  
A thousand ways, is there no black or white?” \*

Unnumbered shades of grey do not destroy or put in doubt the distinct reality of black and white. Overdoing blunderers, like Dubius, console men of careless lives, by giving occasion for the excuse that, if *they* are wrong for *want* of care, they can point out *some* who are wrong from *excess* of care,—on the foolish principle, often actually used in recriminating defence of culpable errors, that two blacks make a white, or two wrongs make a right. But these errors should warn upright minds of the importance of maintaining, in practice, a close and obvious alliance between conscientiousness and good sense. “What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.” There is a wide difference, both in quality and operation, between pharasaic scrupulosity in trifles and the religious integrity that is “in the fear of the Lord all the day long.” It is nothing less than the difference between form and substance; or between a coloured waxen image and a living person.

Are not *conscience*, *principle*, and *firmness*,—both the words and the things they signify,—often misapplied

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\* Pope.

through inattention to the important distinction between things for which there is *no just or lawful substitute*, and things for which there may be various *innocent and useful substitutes*?

For instance, there is not, there cannot be, any substitute for *plain integrity*. What is falsely called honour, and what is truly called plausibility, with all the forms and degrees of cleverness, address, and dexterity, are no substitutes for integrity. A Christian should never entertain the thought of any substitution or exchange for this, or for any other moral or religious virtue.

Again, none of the virtues, nor any mental endowments or achievements, can ever be substitutes for personal godliness, or faith working by love, and producing all the fruits of righteousness.

Nothing, again, can be a substitute, in the case of a minister or missionary, for the *spirit* of the Christian ministry, including the call of God, zeal for His glory, pity for perishing sinners, and love of the brethren. Learning, eloquence, tact, and varied accomplishments, may somewhat disguise essential deficiency, but cannot by any means supply the place of the indispensable qualifications.

And nothing, amongst us, can be efficacious as a substitute for the *spirit* of the Wesleyan ministry. With us, it is indispensable to comfort and success, that, while we love all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, the mind, heart, and habits, of our ministers and missionaries should be in spontaneous harmony with the spirit of their own denomination. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos iii. 3.) The truth implied in this question is of great practical importance. Our discipline and usages have a powerful tendency to preserve our oneness as a religious body; but it is desirable that each of us should use means to keep ourselves right in this respect. About half-a-century ago, a young preacher, who was

temporarily supplying the pulpit, during the protracted illness of an afflicted minister, stated that his practice was—to read Mr. Wesley's sermons at the rate of one a day, which, he said, did not occupy more than from ten to fifteen minutes. When he had thus read them all, he began again with the first; and thus, by easy and gradual means, secured a familiar acquaintance with the contents of those precious volumes. A missionary should also endeavour, by a careful reading of our *Minutes*, and other connexional publications, to be well-informed respecting our home-work; and, by a studious attention to the "Instructions to Missionaries," prefixed to each Annual Report, should have his mind stored with prudential counsels, suitable for various exigencies in his peculiar sphere of duty.

Conscience, principle, and firmness, belong to matters of the kind for which no substitutes can be found.

But when any person applies these terms, and the things they signify, to matters which rather belong to the sphere of judgment and prudence, the results are confusion and perplexity.

There are many things for which substitutes not only *may* be found, but should be *sought*, when *needed*.

The cases are various and numerous, in which an upright and prudent man, when he cannot have what he, perhaps rightly, prefers, will look for the *next best*. To refuse to do so, is not principle, but perversity; not proper firmness, but obstinacy; not enlightened conscientiousness, but weak and purblind scrupulosity. It is not pleasant to have frequent intercourse, even with a friend, who is always talking about his conscience; and who, on the plea of conscience, is fastidious, contentious, and pertinacious. Such persons resemble a certain inhabitant of the waters, which wears its bones outside; presenting a hard and harsh exterior instead of skin; and grasping, with indis-

criminate tenacity, whatever it can take hold of. The conscience should rather be like the column of bones in the human frame: unseen and unheard, but imparting central support and stability to the whole system of the body.

The proper application of *principle* and *expediency*,—both as to the expressions and the qualities they express,—depends very much on the question whether the point to be determined is a matter of *plain moral right or wrong*, in which a pure conscience has no alternative, and can find no substitute for what is best; or, whether it is a matter *admitting of opinion*, of *variety*, of *preference*, of *degrees*,—in which, what we prefer being wanting and unattainable, we *may* and *should* look for the *next best*. The habit of justly classifying these things is necessary to make the upright man also a judicious practical man, who “guides his affairs with discretion.” An upright man will have his *means* lawful, as well as his *ends*; but if he is wise, he will make a great difference, in practice, between ENDS and MEANS. In the face of cold or fierce obstructions, a decided and sagacious character may seem to superficial observers, to be giving up his purposes, when he is only giving up *one* set of *means*, and advisedly changing his plan of operation, to secure his *ends* in a new, and, perhaps, equally effectual manner. It would probably be found, as the result of extended investigation, that the great men of action have mostly been immovably resolute as to their ends, but prudently flexible as to their means. He who will insist upon having his own way in all respects, his own methods and instruments, as well as ends, without variation or adaptation according to circumstances, and who makes conscience of doing so, must have great advantages of position to prevent him from being made the victim of circumstances; while he who, with clear views and strong purposes, knows *how* and *when* to yield,

may mould and wield even untoward circumstances, and make them subserve his general aims.

When the address comprising the preceding paragraph was delivered, the writer had not seen Isaac Taylor's "Wesley and Methodism." The following sentences in Mr. Taylor's work are remarkably confirmatory of the views expressed above.

"Charles Wesley would have been stopped on his course, while struggling with his abhorrence of that only means of carrying forward the work they had commenced—lay-preaching. But John could be stopped by no interior reluctance, as by no external obstacle or opposition, when once the work he was born to achieve stood out clearly developed before him. At this time it did so stand developed in his view; and while he, of all men, was the most self-determining in relation to whatever came under his entire control, none was more docile than he, or more quick to adapt himself to new circumstances, when called upon by his religious convictions, or by his practical good sense, to relinquish his cherished opinions. Besides, men of his order of mind are seen more readily to give way to the course of events, than others do, because, while they do so, they inwardly rely upon that inexhaustible store of expedients, and of ready skill, which will enable them, though driven from their path for a time, to return to it anon."

When we are painfully excited by "hope deferred" of great good which powerful obstructions preclude us from achieving, or by the prevalence of hateful and, at the time, immovable causes of social mischief, it will be assuring and consoling to call to remembrance some glimpses from the serene, all-seeing wisdom, which shine upon the perplexed and beclouded scenes of time, as light in darkness. Our missionaries may, sometimes, in far countries, observe grievous evils which they cannot remedy, wickedness in powerful positions which they cannot directly counteract

or restrain; and, in the presence of helpless suffering, or triumphant and destructive vice, may be tempted to indulge a degree of anxiety beyond what is either needful or useful. They may have occasion to say, "I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there." (Ecclesiastes iii. 16.) "So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter." (Ecclesiastes iv. 1.) But, "If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for He that is higher than the highest regardeth." (Ecclesiastes v. 8.) "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb." (Psalm xxxvii. 1, 2.)

As to the misrepresentations and calumnies to which a conscientious and faithful course of action may expose us, let us "also take no heed unto all words that are spoken." (Ecclesiastes vii. 21.) And let us be encouraged, while we follow the faith and practice, to emulate the confidence of him who says, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our *conscience*, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." (2 Corinthians i. 12.) And let us maintain the high-principled patience recommended by him who says, "Having a good *conscience*; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing." (1 Peter iii. 16, 17.) And while we have reason to "trust, we

have a *good conscience*, in all things willing to live honestly," (Hebrews xiii. 18), let us not be astonished or dismayed at every extravagance of frivolous or mischievous gossip; for, "the tongue" (of idle rumour) "can no man tame." (James iii. 8). Why then should we be continually defending our reputation? Many slanders and mistakes may be safely let alone, while we are about our Master's business.

The great means of support to Christian calmness and fortitude is, to take care *that we walk in the light of God's countenance*. Many apparently desirable things may be out of our reach, but this is the ascertained privilege of the people of God. "Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus and having an high priest over the house of God," we may "draw near, with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." (Hebrews x. 19-22.) "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance." (Psalm lxxxix. 15.) "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John viii. 12.) What better can we desire? "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us." (Psalm iv. 6.) "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans viii. 31.) It is thus our privilege to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." (Ephesians vi. 10.) If we are so, we shall not want fortitude in the day of trial; His grace will be sufficient for us; and we shall be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us."



## THINGS WHICH MAKE FOR PEACE.

“ Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”—ROMANS xiv. 19.

It is said in the next chapter, verse 4, “ Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning,” meaning the things recorded concerning the patriarchs, concerning the Israelites in Egypt or in the wilderness, or in the days of the judges, kings, and prophets. It may with equal truth be said—that the disputes and mistakes of some members of the Apostolical churches were written, in the New Testament, *for our learning*, that the cautions and counsels addressed to them, may instruct and profit us and all believers to the end of time. The text has some reference to misunderstandings and dissensions in the primitive churches, concerning matters which owed much of their interest to the prejudices and excited feelings of those who contended about them. The Apostle, in effect, cautions his readers against so magnifying such things as to mistake them for essentials ; and exhorts them to keep in view, and to strive for, better and greater things.

Neither in a morning nor an evening congregation can we be assured that all present are in a state of salvation. We trust many of you are so, with various degrees of spiritual growth. Those who are in a state of grace will find in the text something which concerns themselves, as to their wants, dangers, or duties. If any persons feel as if the duties and the cautions urged by the Apostle were no concern of theirs, it is too likely that, *at present*, they have neither part nor lot in the blessings and privileges of Christian believers.

The words of this exhortation lead us to consider the NATURE and the OBLIGATION of what is required.

I. The NATURE of what is required.

1. Excellent and precious *ends* are proposed,—

*Peace* among the people of God, and their mutual *Edification*.

These are closely and naturally connected.

Peace; not the peace of dead or indifferent souls; but of loving and earnest members of Christ.

Edification; the building up of believers in truth and holiness.

2. The *means*—are the things which make for the *ends* proposed.

Things which make for peace.

Not—the absence of firmness in matters of plain duty. This does not answer either in families or churches.

Not—the sacrifice of purity or integrity for quietness. The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated; full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality and without hypocrisy.

Not—the giving up of what we ought to do, or the doing of what is wrong for the mere sake of avoiding opposition or dissension.

Not—the hazarding of *future* peace and order for *present* quietness.

Not—a mere truce with difficulties. Calm courage, a firm, open, unshrinking adherence to truth and righteousness, prevents many small attacks which incessantly cross the path of the cowardly.

But—the *things which make for peace* are—to feel and to shew towards those we have to deal with

*Humility*—not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think—let each esteem other better than himself—in honour preferring one another.

*Love*—which worketh no ill to our neighbour; but walks charitably; that is, lovingly.

*Mutual respect*—not grudging, censoring, or despising one another. “Honour all men.”

*Fair and just dealing*—equity, sincerity, rendering to all their due—owing no man anything.

*Patience*—bearing the infirmities of the weak and ignorant.

*Forbearance*—not harshly condemning, but respecting the conscientious scruples of others, neither avenging nor pleasing ourselves, in a spirit of self-will.

*Rendering* not evil for evil, but good for evil; not attempting, as corrupt nature would prompt, to overcome evil with evil, but overcoming evil with good.

The contraries of these *destroy peace*.

*By Pride* cometh contention. To show contempt of others, to betray self-seeking or self-will, to urge and pertinaciously claim the extreme of what we think due to us—are not the ways or means to *peace*, but provocations to *strife*.

Peace cannot be had or kept on the plan of each one demanding all that he may think he has a right to.

A society or church composed entirely of self-important, scornful, censorious, self-willed, and obstinate persons, can have no peace; but will be most unamiable, distracted and miserable, and incapable of being edified *till* better dispositions prevail.

Peace is not of itself an active thing—it is a negative of strife and its many vexatious consequences; but all the graces and virtues, and all the best endowments of mind and character promote and fortify true peace.

There must be *peace*, that there may be edification—“Then had the churches rest, and were edified.” Acts ix. 31.

2. After *peace* has been obtained, or after all right means

have been used to obtain and preserve it, there are other "*Things* wherewith one may edify another."

To watch over each other, not suspiciously or enviously, but with *godly* jealousy.

To exhort, instruct, and admonish one another, not reproachfully, but with meekness and gentleness.

To feel and shew *sympathy*—rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

To keep in view ourselves, and remind others, of the *principal* things—and not allow ourselves to be turned away from *them* to trifles.

The contraries *hinder* edification.

To be indifferent or careless about the spiritual state,—the mental or moral improvement, the joys or griefs of others; or to let trifles turn us aside from great things, will keep ourselves from being built up or made strong in the Lord, and from being made useful to others.

3. A persevering use of the means enjoined.

The *things* which make for peace and for mutual edification, we are charged to

*Follow after*

It is not enough that we avoid saying or doing things that offend or provoke others, or that we be quiet if others will let us alone. We must *study* to be quiet, and *strive* for mutual edification.

We must seek, keep in mind, diligently and carefully cultivate the *means*, for the *sake* of the *ends*; and contrary things must be forborn and avoided.

For the *sake* of peace, we must not use the grievous words that *stir up* anger, but the *soft answer* that turneth *away* wrath.

The *love* of peace, the *desire* for edification, will both suggest and animate the use of suitable means.

II. The obligation of what is enjoined.

Let us *therefore*, because of the certain and momentous truths and facts previously stated and urged.

In particular

Because of the *inferior* and *trivial* nature of most of those things which are occasions of strife and causes of offence among Christian brethren.

Meats, drinks, washings, sprinklings—matters of ceremony or outward observance, or of human theory or opinion,—things which may be either observed or omitted, attended to or let alone, without sin : things indifferent.

In such things a great amount of self-will, of passion and prejudice, and domineering arrogance is too often engaged ; to the neglect or violation of great obligations.

Less things than these—personal preferences, individual whims, poor petty objects, are, through the depths of human weakness and the errors of good men, allowed to become occasions of offence.

Awful and irreparable *mischief* may be caused to the church on earth, and to the souls of individuals by a *selfish course*. “Through *thy* knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died ?” We might also ask—Through thy self-will, or want of patience, or forbearance, or fidelity—shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died ?

The comprehensive *responsibility*—present and future, of all to Christ. He now governs, and will hereafter judge His people. Romans xiv. 10. “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

He that in these things—the chief things—righteousness, peace, and joy, etc., serveth Christ, is acceptable to God and approved of men. In mutual prejudices and contentions His government is easily lost sight of.

There is the additional consideration of the Apostle’s inspiration and authority—the word of God by him on

se and many other passages. Romans xii. 18. "If it possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with men." Ephesians iv. 31. "And be ye kind one to other, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you." v. 1, 2. "Be therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for sweet-smelling savour." Colossians iii. 12. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering."

And his example, combining the greatest firmness in maintaining what was true and right, with the greatest equality and gentleness in things indifferent or personal.

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## FOLLOWERS OF GOD.

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children ; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us.”—EPHESIANS v. 1, 2.

“WALK not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the light of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus; that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

The idolaters were disposed by their natural depravity to be imitators of their *false gods*: and there was scarcely a vice or a crime, however base or shameful, which had not been brought into some degree of credit among the corrupted Gentiles of antiquity, as among the eastern pagans of our own times, through the vile enormities ascribed in heathen fables to their imaginary deities. The wicked and profligate worshippers could plead the example of their gods, and were their zealous imitators. Those especially who had been initiated into the boasted mysteries of paganism, were deeply polluted by their evil fellowship, so that it was a shame even to speak of those things which were done of them in secret.

*Wicked men* follow the example of their father the *devil*, and may be known accordingly as his offspring, for his

works they do. Surely then the *beloved children* of God should imitate his excellence, and ought especially to walk in love with their brethren, neighbours, and even enemies, "*as Christ hath loved them.*"

The perfection and obligations of this example are infinite: so that there is no kind nor degree of self-denying, liberal, laborious, patient, or forgiving love, to which it will not direct the grateful believer.

Christians are to *follow* or *imitate God*, as His *beloved children*, in all His moral perfections, especially in that love from which our salvation flows. This might be best seen and contemplated in the person of Christ, who having assumed human nature, gave Himself for us, etc. Not that the Father had pleasure in His sufferings on their own account, but His justice and holiness were glorified, and a way was opened for the equitable and honourable exercise of mercy. The Father shewed His love in not sparing His only Son; and the Son in giving Himself for us. To be followers of God is to "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and given Himself for us."

The subject of this text is the following or imitating of God, by which is meant not an occasional and intermitted effort; but a practical, comprehensive, habitual system of action; a plan of life.

Let us consider

I. The nature,

II. Duty,

III. Privilege, of such imitation of God as these words express and require.

I. Consider the principles or nature of this imitation; those things which are essential to it, and in which it must consist. In order to this it will be expedient to ascertain

In what respect,—to what extent,—and in what method or manner we should imitate God.

1. In what respect should God be imitated by us.



Generally,—His *imitable perfections*. “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

HOLINESS. 1 Peter i. 15, 16. “But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy.” Leviticus xi. 44. “For I am the Lord your God; ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy.”

KINDNESS to evil and good: acknowledging the claims of misery as such, independent of worthiness. Matthew v. 45. “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

MERCIFULNESS, FORGIVENESS. Luke vi. 35, 36, “But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the *children of the* HIGHEST: for HE is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, *as your Father* also is merciful.” Matthew xviii. 33, “Shouldst not thou have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I also had compassion on thee?” “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” Colossians iii. 13, “Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” “And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of *perfectness*.” Our Saviour says, “learn of Me;” and the apostle Paul, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

PERFECTION in the sense of maturity, completeness, consistency, harmony. We are reminded of this by the quotation above, “Put on charity which is the bond of *perfectness*.” “Be ye therefore *perfect*, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” “That ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” “That ye may be perfect

and entire, lacking nothing:" and "I am the Almighty God, walk before Me, and be thou perfect." Some seem to claim a right to have a capricious taste in morals; to pick and choose among the virtues. Some admire dignity of character, and forget meekness and humility; some admire fortitude, and overlook gentleness; some admire generosity, and undervalue prudence and justice. Some professedly great admirers of justice, would think it being righteous overmuch to establish a rule of equity or rigour, which when applied to themselves could only condemn them. The fruits of the Spirit include every Christian grace and moral excellence.

God should be imitated by us ESPECIALLY in LOVE, as here required. "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." This second part of the text is explanatory of the former. "*Above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.*" God is love. And love is that perfection of His which is most suitable and necessary to be imitated by us. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" "My little children let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." "A new commandment I give unto you, *that ye love one another*; as *I have loved you*, that ye also love one another." "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have

loved you." In these instances the love of God *in Christ*, the love of Christ *to us*, in its most express and emphatic manifestation, is that part of the divine perfection which we are especially called upon to imitate. In love, Christ gave, not merely extrinsic possessions, but *Himself*—Himself, not only as a friend, but as a *sacrifice*; being moved by compassion to submit to the lowest self-abasement, to the most extreme self-denial, to the most dreadful anguish, to the most terrible and shameful death, for the benefit of those He pitied in their *deserved* misery.

Compassion for the deservedly miserable, condescension to the mean and vile, readiness to forgive injuries, self-denial, enlarged beneficence, all in full perfection, were most illustriously manifested in that love which is here proposed as our pattern.

And beneficence, as the effect of love—"given Himself for us"—when we give of our substance, let us humbly and gratefully remember Him who gave *Himself*.

2. To what extent should we be imitators of God in Christ, or how far?

As far as POSSIBLE in the things already mentioned.

There is no danger of our exceeding in respect to God's imitable perfections, and Christ's redeeming love. There is no kind nor degree of self-denying, liberal, laborious, patient, forgiving love, to which the divine example does not direct and animate the believer.

Where imitation would be improper, bounds are set which we cannot pass. We cannot imitate divine power, authority, majesty, and judgment. We cannot thunder with a voice like God's, nor summon the lightnings "that they may go, and say, Here we are;" nor can we judge like Him, who said, "Woe unto you," etc.

The extent of the example, and the degree of required resemblance we should strive and hope for, are expressively signified by the peculiar phrase, "*walk in love*," and "*as*

*Christ* also hath loved us." WALK—a system, a course of action, successive, uniform, forward steps; "*walk in love*," as in our clothes. Love must be as the *habit or clothing* of our mind, or as the road in which we walk. As water is the element of fishes, and air of birds, so should love be the element or atmosphere of Christ's disciples. It was the element in which He moved.

Many works, commonly esteemed good, appear very poor and defective when tried by this standard.

3. In what method should we go about this imitation of God?

All skilful imitators *contemplate* their model with earnest, admiring, persevering attention;—fill their minds with it. *They make attempts* practically to do the like—in like manner; after looking, they try.

They *compare* and *examine* what they produce, and judge of it by the pattern. Having detected defects and differences by such reference to their model, they correct or supply what is wrong or wanting, and try again.

Let us thus, in the spirit of faith and love, contemplate our great exemplar; let us ask ourselves, "How would He have felt? what would He have said or done in our place?"

But the text suggests, and, indeed, prescribes a method, the only one in which we can succeed—*as dear or beloved children*.

Children naturally resemble their parents, more or less, in person, voice, motion, etc., often in talents and disposition.

Beloved children have, besides natural likeness, an amiable *propensity* to imitate their parents in tones and gestures, and afterwards in opinions and principles of action.

Jesus appeals to this as a known law of human nature. "I speak that which I have seen with *my* Father, and ye do that which you have seen with *your* father. They

answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God; this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to Him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but He sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear My word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

If therefore we would be imitators of God, the only effectual and practical method is to become His children, by adoption and regeneration; seek to be born of the Spirit, and thus to become partakers of the divine nature.

Then copy Him, as children their parents.

Whatever further is wanting, *ask of God*, who giveth liberally, without upbraiding the petitioner; *ask* for the *Holy Spirit*; *use* the means of grace; strive to attain self-knowledge and self-government, walk by faith.

If we would emulate the faith and holiness of apostles and martyrs, we must not so much copy *them*, as imitate THEIR MODEL, adopt their principle of imitation of God; not be copies of a copy, or translators of a translation;—*go to the original*; go to the *fountain* from which they drank living waters.

Yet we are to be followers of them as they are of Christ; and their example is precious, often as an illustration of Christian principle, and as an exemplification of what is possible by grace. It justifies those who are

actuated by the *mighty working* principles of faith and love in attempting and expecting great things.

## II. Let us consider

Our *obligation* thus to imitate God in Christ.

1. It is plainly commanded in many passages. It is enjoined by the Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian dispensations. It is taught even by the example of idolaters.

2. Can anything be more fit and proper than that we should imitate the most perfect model? Many precepts and exhortations most reasonably urge us to imitate beauty, excellence, perfection.

3. Christ's example is not only an instruction but an authority. He says, "I speak that which I have seen with my Father." This view is suggested by the observation and appeal of the master in the parable to the cruel servant, "Shouldest thou not also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as *I* had pity on *thee*?" The principle appealed to is that they who have *needed and received mercy* are especially bound to *shew* mercy; and that if we see mercy to be excellent when exercised towards ourselves, we should learn to go and do likewise. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." When the insolvent servant said, "Have patience with me and I will pay thee all," he laid down a law of conduct for himself. What we ask God to do for us, we ought to be ready to do for others. "The measure ye mete shall be meted to you again." Christ laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

4. Christ's love to us gives Him immediate claims on our gratitude, but we cannot recompense Him, we cannot minister to Him in His own person. He is neither accessible in bodily form nor needy—but He has transferred or made over the debt to the poor and miserable, appointing them *His receivers*. "Inasmuch as ye have

done it unto one of the least of these ye have done it unto me." "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

5. Our conscience, our views of duty, our self-examination should be regulated by this rule and obligation. By these let us search and try our ways.

III. We are to consider the *privilege* of imitating God,—obvious from the transcendent elevation of the models proposed.

1. To be *like God* in righteousness and true holiness, was the glorious dignity and high privilege of human nature *before the fall*.

2. To tread in the steps of the great—to copy the dress, the looks, the language and behaviour of the admired, the illustrious, and the powerful, is not generally considered *task-work*. To resemble them calls forth eager and ambitious effort, and immense voluntary sacrifice of time, ease and pleasure—the spirit and aim of fashion.

We are here incited and animated by the truly noble-minded, yet most self-abased Apostle of the Gentiles, to fashion our spirit and behaviour, not after the princes and grandees, and splendid menials of earthly courts, the potentates and conquerors of the world,—but after the spirit and conduct of the immortal King of kings, and Lord of lords.

The labours of fashion are not prescribed by law, nor enforced by penalties; they are stimulated by emulation.

3. That it is a privilege is suggested by our being encouraged to follow God as *beloved* children; it is one of the high and noble rights and privileges of divine parentage, it is of the very essence of spiritual grandeur that Christians should be like their Lord, and follow Him, not as slaves in the train of a conqueror, nor as abject imitators of royal caprices,—but as dear children.

4. The Apostle John exults in this as one of the most certain and valuable privileges of the glory which is not

yet seen,—that “when Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall be like Him.” Christians are now godlike, and will be more so.

5. That we might possess such a privilege, Christ has come down to us, descending to us in self-abasement, that we might ascend to Him in ennobling and glorious imitation. Those exertions of benevolence and generosity which on account of the low state of average practice, appear extraordinary and transcendent, are really the noble privileges, the honourable distinctions, as well as the duties, of those children of God who thus serve Him.

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## DOING ALL IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

“Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”  
--COLOSSIANS iii. 17.

It is one of the surpassing excellencies of the holy Scriptures, that they contain a great number of short, plain, pithy precepts, which are so clear and weighty, so easily remembered and applied in practice, so distinct from each other, yet so comprehensive, that nothing less than divine wisdom can be deemed the adequate and the actual source of instruction so various, compendious and complete, which has been thus provided for our infirmity.

The two great commandments concerning the love of God and our neighbour, the golden rule of equity which is founded upon and which explains the second of those commandments, the avowal in the prophetic Psalm, “I have set the Lord always before me,” the corresponding precept of Solomon, “In all thy ways acknowledge Him,” the wise man’s charge, “Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long,” the royal preacher’s conclusion, “Fear God and keep His commandments,” the apostolic caution, “Abstain from all appearance of evil,” and the Pentecostal summary, “Repent, and be converted”; these, and many other Scripture precepts, are so closely connected with the chief doctrines and duties of revealed religion, that there is in each of them a blessed and glorious fulness, while they are easy to be understood, remembered and applied as distinct practical rules.

The twenty-third verse, “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men,” and a parallel passage in 1 Corinthians x. 31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,” and the text we have selected as the subject of our

discourse, are passages of the same important class as those before noticed ; plain, weighty, practical and comprehensive.

It is proposed to consider the MEANING, the EXTENT, and the OBLIGATION of this part of the *law of Christ*.

I. Let us endeavour to ascertain the MEANING of this rule, which declares that Christians should always speak and act in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The first question concerning the meaning of this injunction is, whether the *letter* or the *spirit* is chiefly to be received and obeyed ; whether we are, literally, to *mention* the name of Christ, on every occasion in speaking or acting, or whether we are not rather directed, by this precept, to *something more spiritual, practical, and substantial*, than merely taking Christ's name into our lips.

1. In *some instances the literal sense* may be practically followed with propriety and advantage. It has probably been from a regard to the strict letter of this precept, that the practice or form has been so generally adopted of concluding prayers and thanksgivings with the expressions through Christ, or for Christ's sake, etc. This manner of concluding our devotional exercises is doubtless very proper ; and, as far as it goes, is literally according to the rule ; but even in these instances, we must carefully guard against losing the spirit in the letter ; and there is reason to think that the meaning is far deeper, that something more important than the respectful utterance of a sacred name is intended.

2. For the several following reasons, we are not at liberty to interpret this text in a grossly literal sense.

To do this would lead us to *condemn* some whom God does not condemn, even some of the holiest saints of all ages and churches. It has not been the practice of the wisest and best of those whose piety is most indubitable.

It would be *comparatively easy* to keep the mere letter

of the text, even though the spirit and design were most essentially contravened in practice. It has always been found easier to say, Lord, Lord, to bow at the name of Jesus, make the sign of the cross, make broad phylacteries, to say long prayers, than to keep the commandments with a believing and loving heart.

*Hypocrites* and *formalists* will always *exceed* the most sincere in wordy and showy manifestations. Those whose piety or virtue is most superficial, as they bestow *all* their pains upon the *surface* or *outside* of religion, will be in outward show more elaborate, exact, and remarkable, than those whose aim is directed to solid excellence. *Overdoing* in the use of religious phraseology, is so far from being a mark of superior holiness, that it is rather a ground of godly jealousy.

The attempt to carry the mere letter of the text universally and incessantly into practice, would involve considerable danger of using vain repetitions, of *taking Christ's name in vain*. Sacred names should not be familiar as common words. Some of the greatest men in the general church of God, have been remarkable for the reverence they constantly manifested in mentioning the Divine Being by any of His titles. It is grating to the ears of an habitually serious person, when ungodly men lightly use the words, "thank God," in answering a question of common civility. Though not quite so bad as cursing and swearing, it is a breach of the third commandment. A worldly soul is not really thankful to God; and the careless profession of thankfulness is made *in vain*. I believe many of you will agree with me in disliking to hear even the name of the evil spirit taken *in vain*; not because we revere, but because we abhor that wicked one; and therefore we feel a harsh disagreement between the sentiment of solemn abhorrence and the language of light profaneness.

Where the gross literal sense of this and similar precepts

is chiefly regarded and adopted, the most *vile* and *criminal* things come to be done *in the name of the Lord*. Thus while the letter of the rule is observed, the spirit and intention are most effectually violated and opposed.

Dr. Clarke says, "Could it ever be supposed that any person would begin a bad work in God's name? Nevertheless so it is. No people in the universe more strictly carry out the system of connecting the name of God with everything, than the Mahometans: for they never undertake any business, sit down to meat, or write a letter or a book, without prefacing all with 'In the name of the most merciful and compassionate God.' Not only books of devotion, but books on the arts and sciences, tales and romances, books of poetry, and those on the elements of reading and spelling begin thus. Nay this form of words is prefixed to one of the most abominable productions that ever came from the pen of man."

In this spirit the Inquisition with its horrible dungeons and tortures was called the Holy Office. And the savage and malicious curses of Popish excommunication were connected with all sacred names.

3. THEREFORE something *more spiritual, practical* and *substantial* than merely taking Christ's name on our lips is here required.

To do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, receiving Him as our Saviour and King, *we must speak and act* according to His revealed WILL, as manifested by precept, example, or permission. Let *His* will be our LAW and RULE, and nothing against His will be said or done.

From the principle of grateful, admiring, devoted *love* to Him as our MOTIVE.

With an eye to His *glory* as our END. We should always be actuated by the spirit of these sayings, "Let God be glorified. Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. Not

unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory."

Relying on His Spirit as our wisdom and strength, our effectual MEANS of action. "*Thou* comest to *me* with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the *Name* of the Lord of hosts."

In dependence on His atoning merits and well-pleasing, powerful mediation for the ACCEPTANCE of all we do. "Giving thanks to God and the Father by Him." Praises as well as prayers must ascend to God through our Mediator. We are not warranted to say that even our thanks can be accepted without Him.

In all these the DEITY of Christ must be acknowledged. Let every service be done with humble sincerity in such a manner that we trust, obey, and honour Christ; and then we may hope that all shall be accepted through Him. But, if that prevailing name do not recommend us and our works, the divine purity will find something in every one of them which will justify their rejection and our condemnation.

II. The EXTENT—as comprehensive as possible.

*All* our words and actions are to be thus regulated; even every thought must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Those which are professedly sacred, religious, and devotional. *All duties.* All that we are *bound* to do.

Be a Christian in your common duties, prayers, alms, etc., not a mere moralist, or philosopher, or citizen, etc.

David went against Goliah in the name of the Lord. In the xviii. Psalm, he defies all enemies in His name.

2. All voluntary *labour* and *enterprise*: all lawful *business*, all that we are permitted to do. Be a Christian in your business; not a man of the world. It is foolish to say, as some frequently do, "What has religion to do with this? and what has religion to do with that?" Revealed

religion has to do with everything in the conduct of man ; either as commanding, permitting, forbidding, regulating, approving or condemning.

All lawful and proper words and acts may, and should be, in the name of the Lord Jesus—as the labour of our honest callings—the commencement of any right undertaking ; satisfying of our natural and lawful appetites and wants within the limits of temperance.

Christians *do* eat and drink in His name by asking a blessing before meat : and a Christian man need not be ashamed to ask the blessing of God on his tillage, or his flock, or his garden, or his industry in any lawful calling, merchandise or profession.

A Christian father chooses a situation or a calling for his son in the name of the Lord Jesus, when he enquires and deliberates and determines with reference to moral and spiritual advantages or disadvantages.

The law of Christ, not the custom of trade, guides a Christian in his commercial transactions.

It is said that at one time there were great merchants in the city of London, who began every page of their journal in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. If anything unjust or inequitable were entered below on the same pages, how awfully, shamefully glaring, how criminally aggravated would the iniquity appear ! But though you do not put such a heading to the pages of your account books, the eye of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is on every line of every page, and as Christians you are bound in consistency to serve Christ in every transaction.

3. All *endurance*. Christian resignation ; not philosophic patience, or insensibility.

4. All *enjoyment*. The Christian is to *be* a Christian in his pleasures, to have Christian delights and recreations—and none else. There are many things pleaded for as

innocent, by sinners, on which they would perceive it to be ridiculously wrong to ask God's blessing : the race, cards, theatre, etc.

There are many things of a seemingly doubtful, disputable nature—indulgences and deviations for which ingenious apologies are made, and which are involved in a mist of sophistry—which start up in their proper shape when touched by this Ithuriel's spear. "Singing those songs, or partaking of those diversions which cannot be used *in the name of the Lord Jesus*." Be Christians in all things on all occasions.

What cannot be done in Christ's name is unfit for His disciples to do at all.

### III. OBLIGATION

1. This is a plain command.
2. *Gratitude* should prompt our obedience.

" My soul, through my Redeemer's care,  
 Saved from the second death I feel,  
 My eyes from tears of dark despair,  
 My feet from falling into hell."

Those who adopt that verse will not deny the next.

" Wherefore to Him my feet shall run ;  
 My eyes on His perfections gaze ;  
 My soul shall live for God alone ;  
 And all within me shout His praise."

### 3. Affectionate *loyalty*.

In a monarchy, all temporal authority, from the highest judge to a common constable, is exercised in the king's or queen's name.

Under Christ's kingdom, what cannot be done in His name, if done at all, is either treacherously or rebelliously done in His despite, and for the advantage of His enemies.

4. *Justice*—we belong to Him as our Maker, Preserver, Ransomer—we are not our own, we "are bought with a

price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

5. *Reverence* for His holy presence and awful knowledge of us and our conduct—everything is done in His presence; if we sin, it is before His face. "Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?"

6. *Interest*—If we confess Him, He will confess us. If we deny Him, He will deny us. He will be our judge, to Him we *must* give account, and He requires no less than that we do all in His name.

CHRIST will try us and judge us by this rule. "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Where then shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

Try yourselves by this—and see how many are your sins. Who will not plead guilty?

If we lack wisdom, ask of Him "who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not."

Understand and remember that it is not possible to do this in an unconverted state, or in a pharisaic spirit.

Be reconciled to God; receive His Holy Spirit; seek perfect love; and it will become natural to the "new creature" in Christ to walk by this rule.

When we greatly respect and love our fellow-creatures, it is not difficult, but natural and easy to mingle thoughts and feelings, relating to the objects of affection, with all our business, care and pleasure.

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## THE CONTRAST.

“The world passeth away, and the lust thereof ; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”—1 JOHN ii. 17.

It appears from internal evidence which the Scriptures abundantly contain, that the sacred writers had such comprehensive and plenteous inspiration, as gave them sufficient knowledge of the truth to be recorded, and secured them from all error in fact or doctrines. It also appears that while this inspiration directed and elevated their faculties, giving a sagacity and energy not their own,—it nevertheless did not supersede or destroy their individual character, but allowed this to act freely within the wide range consistent with wisdom and holiness : not so much controlling, as enabling and enlightening them. Like the young man at Dothan when his eyes were opened. So that Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, and the prophets ; Peter, James, John, and Paul are, in fact, strikingly distinct from each other, in style and manner, in the personal characteristics and peculiar genius of their writings. They write with the naturalness and raciness of vigorous and free minds ; yet as to the matter and spirit of their pages, they are all the penmen of the one Author of the Scriptures,—the Holy Spirit.

Even among the inspired writers, the Apostle John is remarkable for the plain, easy, quiet way in which he expresses the noblest sentiments ; gives the most important information on matters of fact and doctrine ; or describes those wonderful visions in which he beheld a majestic representation of the vast social changes and grand scenes of providential control, extending from his own time to the end of the world.

In the writings of this Apostle there is an entire absence of the spirit of pomp and display. Full of his inspired subject and of his Divine Master, full of that spirit of love which he so often recommends,—*too* full of these elements of true greatness to be concerned about any petty ornaments of speech,—it is a common thing with him to present the grandest subjects in the briefest and plainest language.

But those who are accustomed to read and admire more ostentatious writers, are in some danger of too slightly passing over various passages in which, with calm dignity, he speaks of the deep things of God, or denounces the world, and asserts the Christian's victory over it, like a man so much at home among great things, as to survey them with settled and serene feelings, and to allude to them as familiar subjects of his contemplation.

The text is an instance of the easy and simple manner in which he sets before us views and sentiments of transcendent importance and sublimity.

In this passage we may usefully consider

The *compared subjects*.

Their *contrasted destinies*.

The *suggested instruction*.

I. The compared subjects.

The *world* and *the lust thereof* are—not indeed expressly and formally, but substantially and practically—placed in comparison with any one individual *who doeth the will of God*.

At the first view such a comparison seems very unequal and startling—the *world* with an *individual*—the vast, unwieldy, populous globe and all it contains with a person! Yet not inadvertently, not by a slip of the pen; but in sober earnest, with full recollection and presence of mind, the Apostle does place these unequal and dissimilar

objects, side by side before us; and with an obvious intention of leading us to ponder and balance them in our thoughts.

Let us examine them separately that we may compare them—see what they are, and then weigh them against each other.

First, the world and the lust thereof.

1. The *world*. This expression has various significations in the sacred writings, and in this instance it may be taken with the utmost latitude, as comprising them all.

Primarily it means—the

NATURAL WORLD—the earth or the greater universe.

Psalm l. “The *world* is mine and the fulness thereof.”

Psalm xc. “Or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the *world*.”

The natural world includes—

The ocean, the continents and islands, the lofty mountains, the deep valleys, the wide-spread plains, the rivers, fields and forests, the treasures of earth’s secret caves, and the various productions of its fruitful surface—the world vast, grand, beautiful, diversified, and wonderful as the Creator has made it.

In a secondary sense, it signifies

The POLITICAL WORLD—the world considered as an assemblage of territories. There went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that *all the world* should be taxed. The devil, taking Jesus up into an high mountain, “shewed unto Him all the *kingdoms of the world* in a moment of time.” The prophet Agabus “signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth *throughout all the world*.”

In this sense the world is viewed as the scene of man’s power, authority, and enterprise—peace and war—of conquest and government—of possession, dominion, cultivation and commerce—comprising a multitude of states,

kingdoms, and empires—with the complicated systems of powers and influences, laws and manners, opinions and languages—by which nations are distinguished and divided from each other, and severally compacted and upheld within themselves.

Thirdly. Sometimes, by an easy and natural figure of speech, as the house is put for the family, *the world*—viewed as *habitable* or inhabited—is used to signify the gross population—the *inhabitants* of the world—the human race. “Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.” It was said of Jesus, “the world is gone after Him.” 1 John, “and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the *whole world*.” The term includes all mankind, all who inherit or inhabit, who possess, occupy, or enjoy the world.

Fourthly. Sometimes *the world* in Scripture means the *wicked majority*—the ungodly multitude. David says, “*men of the world*, which have their portion in this life.” St. John says, “We know that we are the sons of God, and the *whole world* lieth in wickedness.” “Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore they speak of the world, and the world heareth them.” Christ says, “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.” “O, righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee.”

Fifthly. Sometimes the world is spoken of as an enemy; and then, as we have had occasion to shew under another text, it signifies any or all of the external sources of temptation. Thus in 1 John v. 4, 5, “For whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” In the gospel of St. John xvi. 33, “In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good

cheer, I have overcome the world." And in xvi. 17, "The world hath hated 'them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

And the *lust thereof*.

Here, by a natural and easy figure, the desire is put for the objects of desire—the *Lust thereof* for those things in the world that are *lusted after*—the objects of covetous or voluptuous desire, of admiration or ambition—all temporal greatness, even royal power and authority, all worldly riches, with all they can command or bestow; all earthly pleasures, whether gross or refined, whether those of the appetites, fancy, or intellect; all human honours, not excluding the so-called immortality of endless and universal fame among men; all the combinations of these which excite the ardour and animate the hopes of men in all times and countries.

*The world and the lust thereof*—is the world in its most dazzling and alluring, enchanting form—with all its attributes and advantages of vastness, splendour, beauty, variety, and multitude; the world in its most admired state, in its proudest circumstances; not merely such as it intrinsically *is*, but such as it *appears* to the covetous, the voluptuous, the gay, the proud, and the mighty. *The world*, with all its ornaments and fascinations, is placed by the side of an *individual*.

2. *He* that doeth the will of God.

In considering the character of such a one, it will be proper to separate what is *essential* from what may be *accidental*.

*What is essential.* We have now to call in our attention, to contract our thoughts from the scenes of power and grandeur, from the gay, restless, haughty world, to an object distinct, retired, solitary; a *person* who doeth the will of God—who must at the beginning of his religious

course perceive and confess himself, a needy, helpless, guilty sinner.

The will of God—

Is, that *sinner*s repent, that *penitents* come to Christ, that *believers* walk by faith, in reverent love; follow peace and holiness, according to the commandments of Christ; practise all righteousness; deny themselves; take up the cross; endure to the end.

These great outlines of the will of God, are those on which we have “line upon line, precept upon precept.” All true Christians have these, as men of all nations and complexions, have the features and members of a man.

*What is accidental.* The person who doeth the will of God, may be rich, noble, or royal; or placed by genius or by events on the pinnacle of society,—may belong to the middle class,—may be a plain labourer, a smith, a miner, a ploughman, a weaver, a pauper, a slave—a solitary and neglected sufferer. The world may not know their true character, the church may not clearly and thoroughly know and estimate them.

They may not be saints of the world. The individual may be one of an ungodly family, whose foes are of his own household; his strength may be that of a bruised reed; his health and life frail and weak, as the fresh, green, tender stalk of an annual plant in spring. His value may be unsuspected, his motives and character misunderstood. He may be counted by men among the foolish and weak things of the world, things that are *not*. He may be one who has the *root* of the matter with some grievous and displeasing influences of judgment, disposition or manners.

Yet such a one, with all these infirmities, the Apostle dares to place by the side of the world, with its treasures, palaces, and armies, its grandeur, pomp, power, and multitude.

Many such individuals may be found in your own town by those who really seek for them.

Any one of these the Apostle would fearlessly place by the side of *the world and the lust thereof*.

## II. Their contrasted destinies.

Their true character and value are intimated and discovered by the duration God has assigned to them respectively.

The world passeth—the Christian abideth.

The world passeth. The “great globe itself” is fulfilling its appointed periods, and hasting to an end—the end of all things, which is at hand.

The *territories* of the globe are changing their masters, their forms of government, their boundaries. The artificial systems of society, by which nations and empires are held together are passing away. Many *have* been—many *will* be dissolved while the universe remains. The Roman world, that *then* was, like the world that was before Noah, has passed. The state of the political world changes while we gaze at it, as do the tints and outlines of the clouds.

The *inhabitants* are passing away, generations, like the leaves of a summer in autumn.

The *ungodly* are passing away. “They are cut down as the grass, and wither as the green herb.” “They are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.”

The world as an *enemy* is overcome and will be at length subdued, so that “the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.”

The world and the lust thereof are *now* passing.

The time is foreknown in the counsels of Him that sitteth upon the throne—when

“The cloud-capt towers; the gorgeous palaces; the solemn temples; yea, even the great globe itself, and all

which it inherit, shall dissolve; and, like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind."

2. The Christian abideth—in being, in safety, *in the favour of God*; and, however poor or afflicted, in *true felicity*. Through the season of *calamity*, at the hour of *death*, at the *day of judgment*, to all *eternity*.

III. The suggested instruction.

Much is suggested.

1. For the direction of our *esteem* and *affection*.

Let us conform our sentiments to the mind of God, let us not honour what He despises, nor despise what He honours. What *do* we most admire? the world, or a man of God?

2. For our *practical guidance* in choosing our own portion.

We must either perish with the condemned thing—the world; *or* each of us be one of those who do the will of God, and abide for ever.

There is no medium. Men never deceive themselves more than when they imagine a middle class between *men of God* and *men of the world*—or think it possible to serve God and mammon.

In order to do the will of God we must be *Christians indeed*. Christian duties cannot be performed by any who are *not* Christians. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Have we begun, on *this* plan, to do His will?

3. For the consolation and encouragement of good men.



## THE FINAL JUDGMENT.

“ And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God.”—REVELATION  
xx. 12.

THIS is one of the most intensely sublime statements in the sacred writings. It may be doubted whether the famous passage in Genesis, “ And God said, Let there be light, and there was light,”—should be reckoned fully equal to it in grandeur. Moses and John, the first and last penmen of the Holy Scriptures, excel in having presented scenes of the most astonishing greatness, in the fewest and plainest words. The creation of light, as stated by Moses, was the *beginning* of *time*, when the evening and the morning were the first day: the *end of time* will be what John’s vision represented,—the judgment of the human race at the last day. In each instance the *mere words* of the statement scarcely occupy our attention at all. Like the clear colourless glasses of a good telescope, the words give a near and amazing view of remote existences, without obtruding themselves on our notice. We see grand and interesting objects wonderfully brought from afar, but the very perfection of the transparent medium, prevents itself from being regarded.

On the whole, perhaps, the difference of the *subjects* has given John the superiority. His words are as few as those of Moses, in our English Bible; and without being inferior in the unity or the vastness of his subject, he *crowds* the mind of his reader with a *multitude* of *grand ideas*, which are connected with the most powerful and overwhelming *emotions*. He not only rouses and elevates the mind as much as Moses does;—but his few words, like a powerful spell, lead all the faculties of the soul, with conscience at

their head, to take a rapid, anxious glance through all the past and all the future, over the whole human race, in all ages, and countries, over the dark dominions of death, into the deep recollections and recesses of our own hearts and lives, into the unfathomable counsels of Him who sits upon the throne, and into the abyss of the coming eternity.

Next to his Divine Master, John may be considered the greatest of the New Testament prophets:—as such he records many wonderful visions of the future, and causes mysterious and astonishing scenes of glory and terror to pass before the eye of our mind. While we attend to his plain and solemn representations, our thoughts and feelings are the more powerfully impressed, because we perceive that we are reading, not a well-described scene of imagination, but a plain, unadorned account of what he beheld, and what shall be hereafter.

There are none of his marvellous visions of which we have a more clear and affecting apprehension, than that which is expressed in these words, “I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God.” He speaks in the past tense. By the light of inspiration he was enabled to perceive spiritual things as though they were material and visible; and future things as actually present, passing, or past. Therefore, like his Lord, *he calls things that are not, as though they were*; and says “I saw” when speaking of events, which, after so many centuries, are yet to come. The text boldly shadows forth the chief parts of the astonishing picture which the last paragraph of the chapter sets before us.

The two parts which may naturally and easily include all the circumstances that properly belong to the subject, are—

I. The *Assembly* John saw—the *dead, small and great*.

II. The *Situation* in which he saw them—*standing before God*.

I. *The Assembly*.

1. John saw the same multitude we must see. God could as easily give an exact and complete, as an imperfect view of the last day

2. Those whom he saw *as the dead*, were first *the living*. The expression includes all that *have* lived in all ages—Antediluvians, Patriarchs, and their contemporaries; Egyptians, Philistines, Assyrians, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Medes, Persians, Grecians, Romans, Barbarians, Scythians;—the obscure millions of the dark ages, and of America while undiscovered; Jews, Christians, Turks, Pagans; ourselves and our contemporaries, and those future generations who will, perhaps, call us ancients; all individuals of all nations, of every name, type and colour, all were living probationers.

3. Except the few who may be alive at the last day, the assembly consisted of *the dead*; those who shall have passed through the pangs of departure,—in infancy, youth, maturity, or age,—by all the various forms of dissolution.

4. *Small and great*; infants and giants, poor and rich, mean and noble, slave and master, bond and free, the heroes of history and myriads without a name; the oppressors and the benefactors of mankind,—*all*. What a multitude! To see one of our deceased relatives would be terrible; but we shall there behold *all the dead*.

5. He saw the dead, *as living*, standing—the *raised* dead.

Previous to beholding them assembled, though it is stated in inverted order, he saw the *sea* give up her dead. He saw the disembodied *spirits* hastening from hades, the spiritual world; and the *bodies* rising from millions of opening graves, from fields of battle, and from buried cities.

He saw the tremendous re-animation.

When that he saw in vision shall be realised, a trumpet will sound. The living will hear and be changed. The dead will hear in the caverns of the earth, and in the depths of the ocean, and will rise ; and the living will see the dead rise. What a prospect ! John has the advantage in point of time ; but *we* shall see what *he* saw

“ Where are the dead ? In heaven or hell  
Their disembodied spirits dwell ;  
Their perished forms in bonds of clay  
Reserv'd until the judgment day.”

Who are the dead ? The sons of time  
In every age and state and clime ;  
Renown'd, dishonour'd, or forgot,  
The place that knew them, knows them not.

Where are the living ? On the ground  
Where prayer is heard and mercy found ;  
There in the compass of a span,  
The mortal makes the immortal man.

Who are the living ? They, whose breath  
Draws every moment nigh to death ;  
Of endless bliss or woe the heirs ;  
O what an awful choice is theirs !

Then timely warned, let us begin  
To follow Christ and flee from sin,  
Daily grow up in Him our Head ;  
Lord of the living and the dead.

## II. *The situation.*

1. Before God ; before Him, described in the preceding verse, as seen sitting on the great white throne, from whose appearing heaven and earth fled away God enthroned in visible majesty will be the greatest object then.

Many would gladly flee with the vanishing earth and heavens—where should they flee ? where should they hide from His face, and from the wrath of the Lamb, when the

great day of His wrath is come? Earth and heaven flee, but the dead stay and stand.

2. They stand : standing is the posture of suspense and attendance. *They stand* because they *wait* to receive judgment according to their works. A vast multitude which no man can number.

The books are opened—divine remembrance and conscience ; the records of *law, grace, and works,—of life.*

As the judgment proceeds, the assembly gradually divides into three parties—before, right, left.

Fix your attention on the last man.

Examine the countenances of those on the right, and those on the left.

Sentence is PRONOUNCED : it is heard through all that mighty host :—“These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.”

It is *executed*, like the march of morning.

The gates of hell are *shut*. Heaven *opens*, the saints *enter*. *All is over.*

A time in your existence will arrive, when all these things will be *past* ; when you may say with our poet Montgomery—

“The days and years of time are fled,  
Sun, moon, and stars have shone their last ;  
The earth and sea gave up their dead,  
Then vanished, at th’ Archangel’s blast ;  
All secret things have been reveal’d,  
Judgment is pass’d, the sentence seal’d,  
And man, to all eternity,  
What he is *now*, henceforth must be.

From Adam to his youngest heir,  
Not one escaped that muster-roll,  
Each, as if he alone were there,  
Stood up, and won or lost his soul ;  
Some from the Judge’s presence go  
Down into everlasting woe ;  
Vengeance hath barr’d the gates of hell,—  
The scenes within no tongue can tell.

But lo, far off the righteous pass  
 To glory from the King's right hand ;  
 In silence, on the sea of glass,  
 Heaven's numbers, without number stand ;  
 While He who bore the cross lays down  
 The priestly robe and victor crown,  
 The mediatorial reign complete,  
 All things are put beneath His feet.

Then every eye in Him shall see,  
 (While thrones and powers before Him fall,)  
 The fulness of the Deity,  
 Where God Himself is all in all ;  
 O how eternity shall ring  
 With the first note the ransom'd sing !  
 While in that strain all voices blend  
 Which, once begun, shall never end.

In that unutterable song  
 Shall I employ immortal breath ?  
 Or with the wicked borne along,  
 For ever die ' the second death ?'  
 Jesus, my life my light Thou art,  
 Thy word is in my mouth, my heart ;  
 Lord, I believe,—my spirit save  
 From sinking lower than the grave."

You are yet among the living, enjoying the privileges and opportunities of probation. Are you living to Christ or to the world ?

You will soon be the dead—the raised—standing before God.

You may yet choose how and where you will then stand ; but you must not *delay* to choose : the privilege of choice is passing away.

As soon as you enter the dominions of death, the event is decided.

Would you be the Lord's in that great day, you must seek Him *now*. "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes ; cease to do evil ; learn to do well." "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near."

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” Prepare the way of the Lord. Repent and believe the Gospel. Take Christ’s yoke upon you, and learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest for your souls.

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## ON PERFORMING DUTIES WITH OUR MIGHT.

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”—ECCLESIASTES ix. 10.

THIS is one of the most impressive of many inspired admonitions, which warn us of the approaching end of all spiritual opportunities; and urge the supreme necessity of a timely and effectual use of the means of grace and salvation. The text is one of those scriptures which are promptly recollected by serious minds, when they have the most solemn views of the importance of spiritual diligence. It is naturally associated with such monitory sentences as, “Prepare to meet thy God;” “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found;” “Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling;” “The night cometh, when no man can work;” and with such prayers as, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;” “O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.”

But, though the obvious import of this passage has appeared, to common readers, to entitle it to a place among the most weighty of inspired exhortations, unnecessary doubts have been suggested by the rash conjectures and speculative refinements of bold theorists; men who are often more ready to judge of the letter and spirit of Scripture by their own pre-conceived and systematized opinions, than to judge of the soundness of their opinions by the decisions of divine revelation. In their speculations and hypotheses, they have invented unprofitable subtleties, and created needless difficulties, relative to these precious words of inspired wisdom. The questions which have thus been raised, would scarcely have been



thought of by readers possessing a wise simplicity of mind; but as they have been suggested, it is expedient to consider, and as far as possible, to determine them, in order to remove the hinderances to a free and full use of this important passage, as an inspired admonition.

It is therefore proposed,

I. To show that, as the inspired word of Solomon, the text is a proper ground of instruction and exhortation.

II. To consider the matter, manner, and motives of the course of action which the text enjoins.

These two distinct views of the passage will be presented to the reader in two sermons.

In this sermon, it is proposed to show that, as the inspired word of Solomon, the text is a proper ground of instruction and exhortation.

It has been questioned whether Solomon was the writer of this book; whether in this verse, and some others, the inspired writer speaks in his own person, or introduces the remarks of an unbelieving objector; and whether the obvious meaning of the text is consistent with other parts of the book, and with the general doctrine of the Scriptures.

1. An humble attempt will be made to show that Solomon was the author of Ecclesiastes.

Writers who in other instances have shown a hazardous disposition to build aspiring and expanding superstructures, on narrow and shallow foundations, like the old, half-timbered houses, which, by means of projecting beams, were made wider at each successive storey, from the ground upwards, till the highest rooms fearfully overhung the street; writers who have boldly decided concerning scriptural facts, dates, and doctrines, on the frail evidence of obscure and doubtful etymologies, have also denied the title of Solomon to be considered the author of Ecclesiastes, on the ground that the Hebrew of the original is

mixed with Chaldaisms and Syriasms, and contains some foreign words.

But before the captivity, the time of Solomon was that, above all others, in which the Jews had the most extensive intercourse with foreigners. Syria, subdued by David, was a part of Solomon's dominions. Among the members of his household were seven hundred princesses, his wives, who were mostly the daughters of Gentile kings, his tributaries or allies. Numerous foreign ambassadors, and potentates in their own persons, visited Jerusalem on his account. "There came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom." (1 Kings iv. 34.) "And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and raiment, harness, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year." (2 Chronicles ix, 23, 24.) "And he reigned over all the kings from the river (Euphrates) even unto the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt." (Verse 26.) It appears from these historical books, that the foreign commerce, as well as the dominion, of the Jews was more extensive in Solomon's reign, than at any subsequent period of the kingdom. And it is surely not very extraordinary that foreign wives, foreign princesses, foreign commerce, and a continued influx of foreigners of rank, who came to converse with Solomon, should have some influence on the language of that age; or that the effect should be most manifest in the writings of the monarch himself, especially in his old age, after he had so long been accustomed and familiarized to conversation and transactions with foreigners, and so much exercised in the government of foreign territories.

From the time of Solomon to the captivity, the dominion, the commerce, and the foreign affairs and

intercourse, of the kings and people of Judah, were very contracted; and it was likely that, during this long period, the language, both as spoken and written, should again become more strictly national, and more pure from the mixture of foreign words and phrases.

The circumstances mentioned in this book, which agree with Solomon's history, and with his only, are so many, and so remarkable, that nothing appears wanting but the mere mention of his name, in the book itself, to place the fact of his being the writer beyond the possibility of doubt.

The writer himself says, that he was the son of David, that he was king over Israel, in Jerusalem; which no prince of David's line was after Solomon. Solomon's successors were kings of Judah, but not of Israel. The writer says that he gave his "heart to seek and to search out, by wisdom, concerning all things that are done under heaven;" and, certainly, no prince of his race was so remarkable as Solomon for setting the highest value on wisdom. The Preacher says, that when he set out in pursuit of that wisdom, one of his encouragements was, the grandeur of his condition, which corresponds fully with Solomon's history; for, in comparison with his successors, he was a king of kings; and in wealth, probably, superior to all the kings who ever reigned in Judea or elsewhere. The Preacher says, he had more wisdom than all that had been before him in Jerusalem; which no man after Solomon could have said, without vain and ridiculous falsehood. This writer says, that he hated all his labours, notwithstanding the buoyant spirit with which he had planned and executed them, and the distinguished success of all his undertakings, because he must leave them to a successor who might be a fool; which well agrees with the obvious circumstance, that Solomon could not be ignorant of the mental weakness of his son and successor Rehoboam. who was one year old when Solomon

began his reign of forty years. In the fourth chapter, the writer remarks, with evident mortification, on the inclination of his subjects to flatter and follow the heir-apparent, in the old age of the reigning sovereign. He says there was no end of all the people who acted thus; and, as Solomon might well foresee, he predicts that "they also that come after shall not rejoice in him." From Rehoboam's want of judgment and prudence, as well as from the threatened partition of the kingdom, Solomon might easily and truly anticipate, that the multitudes who would hail the accession of the new sovereign, would find cause to deplore their mistake. From his own personal experience, the writer complains of the superlative deceitfulness and mischief of female blandishments; and immediately afterwards declares, that, among a thousand women he had not found one who was what women ought to be: it can hardly be necessary to point out that this agrees most completely with the case of Solomon, who had, as wives and concubines, one thousand women, and who was seduced by his foreign wives to that great folly and crime, that shameful indelible blot of his life and reign, the building of idol-temples.

The title of Preacher, which the writer assumes, and his testimony that, "because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs": these are circumstances which fully correspond with the case of him who, besides numbers of his own subjects, had kings and ambassadors from distant nations, for auditors of his wise discourses; who was wiser than all men; and who is the acknowledged author of the only collection of inspired proverbs.

In addition to these numerous points of correspondence between the confessions of the Preacher, and the history of Solomon, it will not be irrelevant to observe, that he is the

only known individual in whom were combined all those advantages of transcendent power, wealth, and wisdom, which are mentioned, in the beginning of Ecclesiastes, as the chief concurrent qualifications and encouragements for prosecuting that great inquiry, which the writer declares to have been his principal and favourite pursuit.

Between these remarkable circumstances of the Preacher and Solomon's eminent pursuits and endowments, there is a full and striking agreement. That chapter in the second book of Chronicles, which mentions the visit of the queen of Sheba, affords sufficient intimations of a gorgeous profusion, a voluptuous refinement, and a studied variety of magnificence, in Solomon's noble buildings, the furniture and provision of his palaces, his splendid court of attending ministers, his ivory throne with ornaments of gold, his guard with golden shields, the rich and rare articles of his foreign commerce, his numerous chariots and horsemen, his spices and precious stones, his harps and psalteries of foreign wood for the musicians; such a union of boundless resources, with curious inventive variety of luxurious splendour, as fully corresponds with the Preacher's descriptions, in the second chapter, of his vast and varied possessions and treasures, and his diversified experiments on all accessible means of enjoyment. The same chapter of the Chronicles ascribes to Solomon, that superiority of judgment, which the Preacher claims for himself, as the light by which he conducted and concluded his great moral and practical investigation. And though the personal history of Solomon does not record his confessions of the mortifying, general result of his enquiries after worldly happiness, the conclusions stated by the Preacher are such as Solomon, above all men, was qualified to affirm. "So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I

withheld not my heart from any joy ; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour : and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do : and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.” From this mass of circumstantial and internal evidence, it is surely not unreasonable to infer that the book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon.

2. It is proposed to show that, in the text, the Preacher expresses his own meaning.

In some parts of this book, there are expressions, which, viewed by themselves, without taking the subject, context, and scope, as explanatory of the phraseology employed, have appeared so startling to some readers, that they have thought the writer could not intend such passages to be received as his own observations, but rather as the remarks of an unbelieving objector ; and those who have adopted this theory, have generally applied it to the paragraph which contains the text, and to the text itself ; the text being involved in the condemnation, because of its appearing in what was deemed bad company.

But this theory is unsupported by evidence. There is nothing for it but the obscurity of some of the passages it pretends to clear, the merely conjectural opinion of those who recommend it, and the convenience it affords them, by apparently invalidating the testimonies in this book against their theories on other subjects. On referring to Mr. Benson's Commentary on Ecclesiastes, it will be found that, though in his preliminary observations, that excellent commentator mentions with some respect the hypothesis, that a cavilling unbeliever is introduced in some passages, yet in all those on account of which the hypothesis itself was framed, he gives a safe, probable, reasonable, and useful sense, without the questionable assistance of this daring

theory. Dr. Clarke also, after noticing this principle of interpretation, says, "I am not convinced that the book has any such structure." And as the book itself contains no intimations of a dramatic structure, it is for those who propose the theory, to prove it; it is sufficient for those who reject it, to allege the want of proof.

But it may serve at once to show why such a theory was invented, and how truly needless and uncalled for it is, if considerate attention be granted to some observations on the peculiar, plain and characteristic style of this book.

In the plan of this book, Solomon appears to have been influenced by an opinion similar to what has been expressed by a great modern writer, (Burke,) who says, "I am convinced that the method of teaching which approaches most nearly to the method of investigation, is incomparably the best; since not content with serving up a few barren and lifeless truths, it leads us to the stock on which they grew; it tends to set the reader himself on the track of invention and to direct him into those paths in which the author has made his own discoveries, if he should be so happy as to have made any that are valuable."

In presenting to us the results of his extensive experience and observation, Solomon also lays open his method of investigation; not, however for the purpose of directing us into the same paths; but rather to warn us from a track so thoroughly explored, and so full of danger and disappointment. He intimates that his examination had been so complete as to preclude the necessity of any re-examination by persons of inferior opportunities: "For what can a man do that cometh after the King? Even that which hath been already done." Ecclesiastes ii. 12.

The book is an ample treatise, in a very concise style, on two great conclusions, at which Solomon had arrived by the road of persevering experimental inquiry. The first is, that whoever seeks his principal satisfaction, or his chief

good, in temporal possessions, pleasures, and pursuits, though he should possess all conceivable advantages for the execution of his plan, will be totally and miserably disappointed. Besides many other statements to this effect, his words in the second verse of the first chapter, and the eighth of the last, are, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity." His other great conclusion is, that, though a good man may suffer many temporal evils and vexations; and though a wicked man may live and prosper, notwithstanding his crimes; yet this is absolutely certain, that in the end, "it shall be well with them that fear God"; but, "it shall not be well with the wicked"; and that the chief good of man is to be found in fearing God and keeping his commandments; "for, God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

The treatise on these points is presented in the interesting form in which the matter of it grew in the writer's mind, as an important and essential part of his personal history. He makes us the companions and partakers of his thoughts, experiments and emotions; and takes us with him from the beginning to the end of the investigation. He informs us that he was at first encouraged to attempt so vast a series of experiments, by the consideration, that he had eminent qualifications, for trying all the varieties of worldly joy, and for judging of all he tried. He avows his great object, to "see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heavens all the days of their life." (Chap. ii. 3.) His disposition being highly voluptuous, and insatiately inquisitive, co-operated with his design. He gave his heart to seek and search out by wisdom, concerning all things that are done under heaven; and he withheld not his heart from any joy. He confesses that, in his search for the chief good, he tried not only the probable and promising sources, but, for the greater practi-



cal certainty, he also proved the unlikely and unpromising, mirth and wine, madness and folly, as well as wisdom; but that he trod them for the end of wisdom, and his wisdom remained with him; in his wanderings he still kept in sight the grand aim of his investigation, and retained both the desire and the ability to judge aright of all which he experimentally examined.

In proceeding to give us a history of his own mind, in connexion with this comprehensive enquiry, he intimates, that his strong declaration of the vanity of things temporal was never intended to deny, that some satisfaction is afforded by the reasonable and grateful use of God's bounties, and by the pursuits of wisdom.

On these subjects, besides his two principal conclusions, as to where the chief good can *not*, and where it *can*, be found, there are in various parts of the book several subordinate conclusions. He acknowledges that, notwithstanding the complete failure of his proposed end, he had a lively satisfaction, for a time, in the active and varied means; for his heart rejoiced in all his labour (Chap. ii. 10.) And he saw that, notwithstanding the insufficiency of wisdom, if taken to be the chief good, yet, "wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness." He also acknowledges that, for a man "to make his soul to enjoy good in his labour, is from the hand of God: for God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy." (Chap. ii. 24-26.) And a man's powre to enjoy wealth, "to eat thereof, to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour," is declared to be "the gift of God." (Chap. v. 19.) From such passages it appears that his declaration of the vanity of the world was made with discrimination, and designedly guarded by subsequent distinctions and limitations.

The paragraph which contains the text records two of his subordinate conclusions, in which he determines that

it is right and wise to make the best use of temporal enjoyments and opportunities. Some have certainly understood his complaint of the vanity of all things, in a sense more absolute and unrestricted than he intended. His actual decision appears to have been, that all things are vain, not absolutely, but relatively; vain if enjoyed in an idolatrous spirit, and put in the place of God. Whoever tries them in this way against Solomon's warnings, will be brought to his bitter conclusions, by a stern and mighty compulsion, as invisible, but as invincible, as the universal force of gravitation, or as the silent energy that impels us onward from the cradle to the grave. While Solomon sought his chief good in temporal things, as something which they contained, or could bestow, notwithstanding some satisfaction in the intelligent activity of the pursuit itself, his disappointment on the whole was complete and disheartening: hence the sad emphasis of his reiterated complaint, in which he utters his swelling emotion, as well as his full conviction; and therefore speaks comprehensively, leaving details and exceptions to subsequent observation. But in this chapter, and particularly in this paragraph, some of those restrictive observations occur; and in these, the sober, thankful, and temperate use of present things is commended. After some mournful observations on the erring and destructive course of the multitude, in which he laments that "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead," he remarks, "But to him that is joined to all the living there is hope;" because he has yet opportunities to improve his present condition, and to secure his future happiness. And after showing how total is the separation of the departed from the enjoyments, opportunities, passions, and interests, of the life they have quitted, he proceeds to counsel the living, who still have opportunities for enjoyment and for duty, in the

following manner :—"Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." (Chap. ix. 7-10.) Here, in effect, he advises, that we take the things of this life for as much as they are worth; remembering that more cannot be made of them than God designed. But God intended some good to us by his creative bounty; and what he intended for us may be found; though what he left "wanting cannot be numbered." In short, the Preacher counsels us to enjoy, dutifully, the present gifts of God, and to use all the present opportunities of doing what is right and needful to be done; for it is now that God accepteth man's works and services; and there are things to be done in this life which cannot be done in another. This is one of the most important of his subordinate conclusions, the supreme necessity of doing timely and effectually whatever ought to be done.

This review of the peculiar plan of Ecclesiastes has presented occasion to perceive and to remark that there is one excellence in the style of thought and expression, in this work of Solomon, which is also a characteristic of the writings of St. Paul.

Both the Royal Preacher, and the Apostle of the Gentiles, first state and assert the truth strongly, and afterwards strongly limit and guard it. They lay down general maxims, with a free and comprehensive fulness. They argue with a power, brilliance, and kindling vehe-

mence, which resemble the fire and force of lightning. But with all this amplitude and energy, in the statement and enforcement of general truths, they show a watchful recollection of details; an advertance to all reasonable exceptions, limits and precautions; a judge-like sobriety, impartiality, and circumspection; which are quite as extraordinary as their force and grandeur; and are very rarely united with views so vast, and eloquence so impressive.

But it is another peculiarity of these great writers, great even among the inspired, that their limitations of great general truths do not always stand in immediate connexion with the full and bold statements which require to be bounded and qualified. Their large, general statements have to be carefully collated with their subsequent observations on points of exception and discrimination; and this circumstance, added to the weight of meaning with which their concise expression is loaded, demands a pains-taking attention to the general scope, which the indolence of readers is often indisposed to exert.

The want of such attention in readers, and not any real inconsistency in the writers, has sometimes occasioned the serious misapprehension, that they seem to deny in one place what they teach in another. Inattention to the general design of much of the Apostle's argumentation, combined with a microscopic magnifying of some of his expressions, dismembered from their proper connexion, has led to such grave mistakes as, that, by way of displaying and exalting divine sovereignty, he makes it a government of despotic caprice, and unreasoning wilfulness, by asserting an unconditional predestination of individuals to eternal life or everlasting wrath.

Inattention to the general scope of these inspired penmen has been combined with another fertile source of miscon-

struction, namely, the extensive influence which the partisans of monastic austerity and seclusion exercised for more than a thousand years, over the majority of scripture readers and interpreters.

Those partisans found in the writings of St. Paul some commendations of a single life, as suitable and convenient during the hazards of extensive and continued persecution; and, forthwith, in the strongest spirit of special pleading, they assumed a general excellence and merit in celibacy; entirely overlooking Paul's limitation of the advice to seasons of persecution, his admission that even then marriage was not sinful, and his prophetic reference to the corruptions of a later age, in which prediction he classes the forbidding of marriage amongst doctrines of devils.

In a similar manner have misconceptions of the doctrine of the Royal Preacher been produced and perpetuated. The monastic views of Christian holiness, having had the ascendancy in schools, and colleges, and pulpits, during so long a course of ages, still tinge the opinions and prejudices of many religious persons of various churches, to a degree of which the individuals themselves are often unconscious. Those who refused to distinguish between the use and abuse of temporal things; and who were for sending believers to the hermitage, the monastery, or the desert, as the only scenes in which Christians could be kept unspotted from the world, were equally disposed, by the same sweeping precipitance of judgment, to assume that Solomon, in his repeated declarations of the vanity of worldly schemes of happiness, was altogether of their mind. But when they found that, in the same book, a temperate and thankful use and enjoyment of the bounty of Providence was not only not reprobated, but actually recommended, their reluctance to see and admit that the voice of inspired reason could be against their undistinguish-

ing proscription of all temporal satisfactions, stimulated them to invent the theory, that such passages were inserted as the observations of a worldly character, whom they supposed to be holding debate with the Preacher, pleading the uncertainty of the invisible and future state of man, and advising to make the most of present advantages as the only ascertained realities.

Some who do not hold all the extreme opinions of the recluses of the cloister and the wilderness, have understood Solomon's complaint of the vanity of all things, in a sense not much different from the sentiments of those who are in the habit of saying, "There is nothing but trouble in this world." And they are predisposed to adopt the theory which others had invented, because, if they can be persuaded that those passages which allow some value and use of temporal blessings, express the views of a worldly caviller, they can then more easily and securely retain their crude and gross misapprehension of Solomon's complaint. The theory was at first contrived to get rid of such observations, by ascribing them to a bad source, and explaining them in a bad sense. But to suppose that Solomon agreed with those who say, "There is nothing but trouble in this world," is a melancholy mistake. There are many things here besides trouble; many precious gifts of divine goodness; many reasonable and religious enjoyments. That proverbial saying is unworthy of any sound mind, and inconsistent with due gratitude for creative bounty: much more is it unworthy of the comprehensive intellect and inspired wisdom of Solomon. The supposition of a second speaker in this book is gratuitous. In the Song of Solomon, an attentive reader easily perceives, from internal evidence, that much of that book is composed in a dramatic form; but in Ecclesiastes there is no obvious dialogue.

Even that passage in the seventh chapter, which, as rendered in our Bibles, "Be not righteous over much," has been the chief motive with some respectable divines for admitting the theory of two speakers, is, as several eminent men have shown, quite capable of a good and useful interpretation. Melancthon, Bishop Hall, Waterland, and Scott, are named by Mr. Benson, as writers who consider that text to be an inspired caution against straining right into wrong, by exacting the extreme of personal rights, or administering justice with unmitigated rigour.

On such grounds, it is presumed that this theory, which supposes some parts of Ecclesiastes to express the sentiments of an unbeliever, may be put aside as needless and unauthorised, and therefore intrusive and mischievous; and that the whole book, collectively, may be deemed to express Solomon's own meaning, and the meaning of the Great Spirit which inspired him.

3. It is proposed to show, that the obvious meaning of the text is consistent with other parts of the book, and with the general doctrine of the Scriptures.

It is true that if one were obliged to receive the rejected hypothesis as a help to the interpretation of this book, it would be easy to put a bad sense on each part of the text. But it is just as easy to explain the whole in a natural manner, and with a signification worthy to be taught by the wisest of men. If the text could be clearly traced to an unbelieving objector, it might be supposed to recommend that we should make the most and best of this life and its enjoyments, on the ground that we could not be sure of any conscious existence after death. But, receiving the text as the inspired word of Solomon, it is proper to remember, that it would be unfair to any ancient writer in a dead language, to judge of its meaning from an isolated fragment of a sentence, without taking in the subject,

context, and scope, as explanatory of difficult expressions.

Observations, in a strain similar to those in the latter part of the text, are made in the fifth and sixth verses; observations which, at the first view, seem to deny to the dead any knowledge or consciousness; but they are considered by two of our excellent commentators as spoken of the dead in reference only to the knowledge, interests, and passions of this life. “‘The dead know not any thing’ of the actions and events of this world, as this is limited in the next verse,” says Mr. Benson. “Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.” On this Dr. Clarke observes, “It is evident that he speaks here of the ignorance, want of power, etc., of the dead, in reference only to this life. And though they have no more a portion under the sun, yet he does not intimate that they have none any where else.”

It is in the spirit of these comments to say, that, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,” does not mean, whatsoever we have power and inclination to do, but all things that are proper and necessary, all that ought to be done; and that the general meaning of the latter part of the text is, not that the dead are absolutely ignorant and inactive, but that the things we are required to do in this life cannot be done in the grave, or in that hidden state of being into which death will introduce us.

The writer of this book is usually understood to teach the same doctrine, namely, that our life and our probation end together, when he says in the eleventh chapter, “If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.”

The following passages will show that Solomon’s strong manner of declaring that the dead have done with the



opportunities of a state of trial is not singular in the Hebrew Scriptures: "What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise Thee? shall it declare Thy truth?" "Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise Thee? Shall Thy loving kindness be declared in the grave? or Thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark? and Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." "For in death there is no remembrance of Thee: in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?" "His breath goeth forth; he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish." "For the grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day." Thus strongly do the Old Testament writers speak of the state of the dead, as incapable of enjoying the opportunities, or performing the duties, of the living.

With equal strength, but greater clearness, the New Testament writers declare the limited duration of our days of grace, and the hopeless ruin of those who, at the close of life, are still unprepared. Let the following from amongst many passages, be considered as testimonies of the Divine Author of the whole Scriptures; who is of the same mind, whether he speaks by Solomon, or by Paul, or by "His Son whom He hath appointed heir of all things." "Strive to enter in at the straight gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us." "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the

kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." Luke xiii. "Behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

From the various facts and reasonings which have now been presented, it is not unreasonable to conclude, that there is no need to take the text in an accommodated sense, in order to make a moral and religious use of it; and that, without reserve, deduction, or incumbrance, its direct and proper signification, as the inspired word of Solomon, gives broad and firm ground for enforcing a timely and strenuous attention to the greatest interests and duties of mankind.

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## ON PERFORMING DUTIES WITH OUR MIGHT.

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”—ECCLESIASTES ix. 10.

### SERMON II.

THIS precept as it has been attempted to show in the former sermon on the text, is of the highest human and inspired authority ; a precious portion of the wisdom of Solomon, and of the word of God.

Solomon wrote other books, which are lost. “His songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall. He spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.” God had given him “wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore :” a transcendent capacity, penetration, and energy of mind, to which the acquisition and communication of knowledge were easy and delightful : a universal genius, which desired and attained a consummate mastery of the policy of government, and the prudence of common life ; which enabled its possessor to combine the excellencies and honours of a sagacious statesman and a moral and religious teacher, of an exquisite poet and a profound natural philosopher, with the rare felicity of a popular and magnificent king ; whose personal ascendancy, on account of his deep and shining wisdom, added so greatly to his other advantages of birth and station, that it was probably the great means by which God “bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel.”

Knowing as we do, that the writer was endowed of God with so many, great, and rare gifts, if this text had come

down to us, not in the Bible, but in some of those uninspired works of Solomon, for the preservation of which Divine Providence was less engaged than for those which were a portion of Holy Scripture, even in such a case, the incomparable authority of this great man would have entitled the passage to our most respectful consideration.

But the text has higher authority than belongs to the greatest and wisest of human or angelic minds; it is the word of that Omniscient Spirit, by whose inspiration all holy Scripture is given.

It is proposed in this second sermon,

To consider the matter, manner and motives, of the course of action which the text enjoins.

The first subject which it presents for our consideration is the matter of what is enjoined, namely, "whatsoever our hand findeth to do;" meaning, whatever is proper and needful, whatever ought to be done.

Let us, then, consider what things are eminently proper and necessary to be done in this life; and let us survey them in an order corresponding with their comparative importance and urgency; placing first what is best, greatest, and most immediately necessary.

1. When we inquire what ought to be done first, the answer is not left to our fallible judgment: a greater than Solomon has said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness."

The kingdom of God is a Jewish phrase, which was naturally suggested to the teachers and people of Judea, by the theocracy under which their forefathers dwelt safely in the best times of their nation; and by the predictions concerning the Messiah, in His kingly character. By the kingdom of God, the hearers of our Lord would understand a revival of the theocracy, under the Christ, as the heir of David's throne, and reigning, like him, by divine appointment, over the people of God. The kingdom then about

to be set up was, in fact, a great and glorious extension of the theocracy, then subsisting in the church among the Jews. The visible throne, and the form and force of temporal royalty, were to be laid aside; but the spiritual dominion was and is to be strengthened and extended by the gospel dispensation, till Christ shall have dominion "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth:" till "all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him;" and the whole earth "shall be filled with His glory." "And the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominion shall serve and obey Him."

The kingdom of God includes the pure and heavenly order, the divine safeguard, and the inspired happiness, of those who have fled from the cruel and destructive reign of sin, to the just, merciful, and peaceful government of God; who are delivered from the Egyptian bondage of Satan's kingdom, and have become the subjects of "the blessed and only potentate," on the liberal and beneficial terms of being children and heirs of God, partakers of His throne and felicity, a family or brotherhood of kings and priests, who shall reign with God for ever and ever. The present blessings and privileges of the souls that acknowledge His government are, "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and, hereafter, as joint-heirs with Christ, they will be glorified together with Him."

We must of necessity, be either wretched slaves under Satan's kingdom of darkness, or rescued subjects and adopted heirs of the glorious kingdom of God. The only liberty which this necessity allows, is liberty to choose or change our master. It is on record, that, in various instances when our Eastern empire had been enlarged by

conquest or by treaty, considerable numbers of the subjects of Hindoo sovereigns removed within the British frontier, soon after its new boundaries were publicly known, that they might escape the vexatious caprices and oppressions of native misrule, and enjoy the blessings of justice and peace under a better government. On the same principles of plain personal interest, it is our first duty to ourselves, and our soundest prudence, to "seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness."

There is but one way to escape to this holy and peaceful kingdom. The truth concerning that one, only way, is plainly stated in the liturgy of the Church of England, where it declares that God "pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy gospel." He who does not repent, cannot and will not come to Christ aright. He who undertook our deliverance, and who must be supposed to know His own plans and institutions, has taught that without repentance we perish; and that "this is the work of God," the work which He most requires and approves, "that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." Faith, the immediate condition of our salvation, viewed as God's gift, is a divine conviction of things whose present existence, and future fruition are not apprehended by our natural senses or faculties, but by a spiritual perception and illumination: and viewed as man's act, it is a movement of the soul, whereby it submits to Christ, trusts in Christ, receives and embraces Christ, and commits itself entirely to Him, in full confidence of His power and will to save. Pray for this divine conviction, use this light of divine illumination, exert this inward effort of the soul, and flee to the kingdom of God.

Those who have not thus sought and found refuge and peace, under God's protecting government, are still under hard bondage to Satan, miserably tied and bound with the

chain of their sins; and if they continue to neglect that great salvation, which they might enjoy in the righteous kingdom of God, will soon, with all their fellow captives, become hopeless, friendless, doomed partakers with those accursed angels, "the rulers of the darkness of this world," whom God "hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

Our escape "from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son," should have precedence of every other human pursuit. Nothing can be named which has an equal claim to attention and exertion. Out of God's kingdom you cannot serve Him, nor be at peace with Him, nor be safe from the wrath to come. If it is of any importance to please Him in whom we live and move, and have our being, and whose awful presence we cannot remove from us, for a single moment; if it is at all desirable to avoid the remorseless tyranny of Satan and his angels, added to the calm, just, intolerable wrath of omnipotent Deity; if peace of conscience, if joy and victory in death, if a place and a name in the book of life, when the dead small and great, shall stand before God, are essential to our well-being; it is right, wise, and necessary, to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

2. That which is entitled to the second place, as next in importance is, our own improvement in every attainable excellence of the mind, heart, and habits. The religious obligation of this does not stand in modern opinion, or uninspired authority. In addressing a church which stood high in his esteem, and against which he had no complaint to urge, St. Paul, after many other fatherly counsels, proceeds in the manner of one summing up to say, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any

praise, think on these things." (Philippians iv 8.) A due consideration of this glorious charge, which reads like an exhortation of a great commander to a noble army, must convince us that Christianity is not the stiff, contracted, barren, unamiable thing, which some of its professed friends, as well as its open enemies, have misdeemed it to be; and that the careful improvement of the whole man, heart, mind, soul, and strength, in all intellectual, moral and spiritual good, is not a mere matter of capricious taste, which one may pursue and another neglect with equal innocence, but a great religious duty. As we have opportunity, let us obey this inspired exhortation. It will prove one of the best things our hand findeth to do, to search and detect, to weed out, root up, and destroy, from our mind, heart, and habits, whatever is false, selfish, harsh, mean, grovelling, envious, petulant, or vain; and to be constantly advancing and growing up in true nobleness of mind, in humility, sincerity, patience, mildness, in intellectual strength and purity, in union with Christ, and resemblance to his excellence.

Christians in common life, as well as those of high station, or noble birth, are called of God to this honourable and glorious course of self-improvement. "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance." All who receive Christ are exhorted to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." Poverty, severe and exhausting labour, want of early culture, and other unavoidable impediments, may preclude an illiterate Christian from aspiring to learning, science, or extensive general knowledge; but no circumstances can invincibly prevent his successful pursuit of all that is most excellent and laudable in human nature.

As all true manliness was exemplified in the laborious life of shepherds and herdsmen, by Jacob and Moses, Gideon, David, and the prophet Amos; and in the lowly



condition of fishermen, and of labourers in other necessary callings, by the Apostles of our Lord ; so in modern days, those who have inclination for the search may still discover intelligent and noble-minded Christian peasants and labourers, who have their souls purified from hatred and envy, from vanity, discontent, covetousness, and base despondency ; and refined, elevated, and enlarged by the rich and holy feelings of experimental religion, by fellowship with saints, and communion with God, and by “the thoughts that wander through eternity.” I, for one, know, that among the religious poor, there are persons, who, though unlearned, are wise ; who, though unpolished, are truly courteous ; who, in want, difficulty, and suffering, are humbly magnanimous ; who, though cramped in their external condition, have an unaffected largeness of heart : who, without the curious and exact information which science furnishes to the educated classes, behold the beautiful green earth, the ever fresh glories of morning, the many-coloured clouds of sunset, or “the moon walking in brightness” amidst the calm grandeur of the starry firmament, as Job, David, and the Prophets, or the first pair in Paradise, beheld them ; receiving, along with the deep impression of visible power and glory, from the varied abundance and immensity of creation, an inexpressibly glorious sense of the unsearchable riches and bounty, the awful beauty and majesty, the unfathomable being and perfection, of the omnipresent Spirit, the Creator, Upholder, and Possessor of all.

Such happy persons have “purified their souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit ;” and are guided and sustained by that Spirit of adoption, which is also the Spirit of wisdom and power. With the Holy Spirit for their guide in perusing the volume of nature, in searching the Scriptures, in observing the ways of Divine Providence, in communing with men and with their own heart, and in

meditating on these rich and varied sources of instruction, they are enabled to learn from each those transcendent truths of godliness, which comprise all that is most important for fallen creatures to know, that they may be wise unto salvation. If other sources of knowledge are opened to them, they will receive and contemplate with delight, "whatsoever things are true;" but in the absence of human learning, they have before them, in the venerable examples of Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, in the history and precepts of Jesus, in the society and fellowship of his living disciples, and above all in the scriptural character of God, and in the inspiration and indwelling of his Holy Spirit, the finest aids and encouragements, for contemplating and realizing whatsoever things are honest, just, pure, lovely, venerable, virtuous, or laudable.

To prefer, as is commonly done, the improvement of our fortune to the improvement of our souls, is a gross blunder, an illiberal, grovelling meanness, of which all who are born of God, and all rational and immortal natures, ought to be ashamed. A mind self-cultivated, purified, enriched, and adorned, in the manner recommended by the Apostle, is a nobler possession than the wealth of Cræsus with the glory of Alexander, and the dominion of the Cæsars.

3. After the salvation and cultivation of the soul, the comforts of the present life, including the wants of the body, may lawfully claim our time and attention, as a part of the things which our hand findeth to do. The context recommends the simple and dutiful enjoyment of temporal comforts. The scriptures do not require or countenance monkish austerities. But the natural desire for such things as are needful and convenient is in most men so strong, that far from needing to be exhorted to those pursuits which minister to the body and its appetites, mankind rather need to be cautioned against sacrificing the soul to its frail habitation, and losing their eternal inheritance by the mismanagement of their life estate.

4. But, "none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." We cannot insulate ourselves, so as to be unaffected by the various influences which flow upon us from our fellow-beings, and to avoid exerting any influence upon others. Whether we will or no, we have fellow-creatures; their co-existence with us involves them and ourselves in a vast mass and multitude of reciprocal influences; and the relative duties, arising from our situation amongst them, are not matters of taste and convenience, but of unavoidable sacred obligation. Our intercourse with others must be either for good or evil; it cannot be wholly indifferent. But if we wish to do and receive good, we must choose the means as well as the end. We must pay the price: for good will not be done with wishing.

But where shall we begin to do good to others? False philosophy would direct us to begin with the most expansive universal benevolence. This is plausible but impracticable. We must begin (where our influence itself begins) at home.

5. The individuals of the family to which we belong, as the heads or members of it, are to be regarded next to ourselves, and as ourselves. If we have parents, brethren, sisters, husband, wife, children, servants, and friends whose kindness has bound us to them as to our mother and our brethren, to promote their everlasting well-being is one of the most proper, needful, and excellent things our hand findeth to do.

In seeking the good of friends and kindred, we should be guided by the same principles as in our own case; for we are to love them as ourselves. Therefore it is right so to care for ourselves as to seek, first, salvation, secondly, moral and spiritual improvement, and thirdly, temporal comfort; it is also right to observe the same order in our care for those who are dear to us. But in the practice of many professedly religious persons, this rational order is

confused or inverted. Without any conscious intention of disarranging these weighty matters, many do practically place first, tender care of the bodies, and indulgence to the feelings, fancies, and petty vices of their children ; second, provision for temporal prosperity, by a good business or a fortune ; third, salvation of the soul : but real mental and spiritual improvement, that which most purifies and ennobles our whole being, and leads from self-knowledge, self-cultivation, self-denial, and the cross, to all true excellence, is often left out altogether.

A servant of Christ, of either sex, at whatever age, under whatever circumstances, can never have cause to lament the total want of an open door of usefulness. Whoever has true religion, with an humble and simple willingness to do good according to his actual opportunities, may find at hand ample and noble occupation, worthy of his highest faculties and best endeavours. A Christian father and mother may be poor, obscure, and afflicted ; but in helping each other to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless ; in having a child to restrain from sin, and instruct in the way of salvation, they have power and opportunity to link together, under the eyes of God and His blessed angels, an everlasting chain of moral causes and effects ; for the influence of their parental reproofs and chastisements, counsels and exhortations, will be spread beyond the ken of mortals, through time and through eternity.

But let every Christian parent remember that there is no ready and easy way to discharge parental duties, or to train up a child in the way he should go. There is no substitute for prayerful, conscientious, patient painstaking. For such objects as a child's salvation, and spiritual improvement, we must be willing to try again, and again, and again, without ceasing, till some ground is gained. God will bless such labours ; they will not end

in vanity. And to have your children reconciled to God, and made good, wise, and noble-minded, is an incomparably better provision for their welfare, than the largest fortune, with a poor, narrow, vulgar, vain, petulant, envious mind, and a heart full of sin. Never be induced to omit such endeavours by the suggestion that, after all, you cannot give your children grace. That is true; but nothing to the purpose. The husbandman ploughs his field, and casts the seed into the ground, and “sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed springeth and groweth up he knoweth not how.” And it never occurs to him as a practical objection against the preparatory labour which he bestows in hope, that he cannot command the sunshine, the rain, and the wind, nor explain the mysterious operations of germination and growth. God is as wise and faithful in administering the kingdom of grace as the kingdom of nature; and will as willingly give grace to the children of faithful parents as He will give showers and sunbeams to the tiller of the ground. If any of you are striving to train children for God, amidst the difficulties of depressing poverty, in the obscure corners of humble life, with no encouraging eye or voice of man to countenance you, let it be enough that the eye of the King of saints benevolently watches over you and yours. The lips of men may not praise a consistently religious parent; but it is sufficient for a pure mind that the end is well chosen, the means suitable, and that the “eye of the Lord is on them that fear Him, on them that hope in His mercy.”

As in your own case, after the general improvement of your children or dependents, the next object of attention and exertion is “providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.” Neglect not the body, while you prefer intellectual and spiritual objects. Let not right be ever strained into wrong. Let every duty and interest be attended to, but in proper order.

6. The next thing the hand of a good man will find to do, is to render all possible service and aid to the church and cause of Christ; beginning with that religious connexion to which the individual is himself united. There are weighty practical reasons for placing this after family duties. We have seen some attempting to do good throughout an extensive circle, by assisting to hold Sabbath-evening prayer-meetings in the villages all round about their own residence, while the good they were bound to attempt in the centre of that circle was neglected as an inferior and slighted thing; their own children being left, without parental restraint to break the Sabbath, in the vilest company, and in the most public manner. Even with such mistakes, we esteem religious sincerity wherever we recognise it; but let us not adopt the mistake while we give credit for meaning well. Home is the first place for the exertion of zeal for Christ, and good-will towards men.

But those who are God's faithful priests in their own families will not be so merciless to their kind, nor so cold in the cause of Christ, as not to care whether their neighbours are going to heaven or to hell; nor can they be so ungrateful to their Saviour, as not to be zealous to advance His kingdom, and show kindness to his friends. They will obey Him who said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another;" and, "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

Blessed are they, (whether they be "dry trees," or childless persons, or whether they be parents of a numerous offspring,) to whom the church and the cause of Christ are precious, and who "choose the things that please God, and take hold of His covenant." Unto them says God, "I will give in Mine house, and within My walls, a place and a name, better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off." When the corruptions of the sanctuary in the time of

Ezekiel had provoked God to the uttermost, until He said, "I will deal in fury : Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity : and though they cry in Mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them : " He then distinguished those who bore true affection in their hearts to His cause and honour. The prophet in vision heard Him say, to one who accompanied His avengers, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof." And when He commanded His executioners with destroying weapons, saying, "Go through the city, and smite ; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity : slay utterly old and young. Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain : " He then also charged those pitiless destroyers, saying, "But come not near any man upon whom is the mark." The Lord who changeth not has the same regard for sincere religious zeal in all ages : still "His servants take pleasure in the stones of Zion, and favour the dust thereof ; " and still His distinguishing mark is "upon the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done " around them ; and upon those who pray for the peace of the spiritual Jerusalem, and who love her prosperity.

Set yourselves, therefore, with a perfect heart and a willing mind, to the service of Christ in His cause and people, by instructing ignorance, by reproving sin, by upholding Christian ordinances, by giving of your time, talents, labour and substance, as God hath endowed you, for the maintenance and advancement of truth, righteousness, and love.

7. After those duties of loving zeal which we owe to the church and cause of Christ, it is enjoined upon us, that "as we have opportunity, we do good unto all men ; " and the exhortations, "Love the brotherhood, fear God,

honour the king," are preceded by the charge to "honour all men." Whatever is truly humane, liberal, and public-spirited, is naturally produced by that love of our neighbour which universally accompanies the love of God shed abroad in the heart. St. John argues that the professions of those who say they love God, and are destitute of brotherly love, not only are not true, but cannot be true. "For he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also."

As Christians are not countenanced by the Scriptures in withdrawing from the duties of common life on pretence of superior sanctity, neither are they at liberty to separate themselves from social ties for the selfish purpose of being snug and quiet, and free from outward annoyances. The Christian is not to withdraw like a spider to the centre of his web, nor to retire within the narrow circle of personal comfort and convenience, but to let his light shine before men, being ready to every good work, and in all things adorning the doctrine of God his Saviour. The child of God naturally feels a concern in the good or ill of his neighbour, his country, and mankind. The new nature he has received in being born from above, and the principles he learns from the word of life, equally determine him to general benevolence. The love of Christ constraineth him to love all men, because Christ died for all.

8. These comprehensive classes of duties our hand findeth to do: they are proper, they are necessary, and ought to be done.

Who can justly complain of having no considerable or important sphere of action? To attend effectually to our own salvation, spiritual improvement, and temporal comfort; to aid children, relatives, and friends, in the same pursuits; to love and help the cause and friends of our



Lord ; to have the whole race of mankind for brethren,—are obligations which belong to all, and will sufficiently pre-engage the time and talents of all.

But some will rather murmur at the abundance of duties, and their own insufficiency for the multifarious and unceasing task. The uncandid excuse of such persons frequently is, “I can do nothing of myself;” which is strictly true, but not pertinent. Truths out of place, and truths mixed with lies, are some of the most imposing and dangerous of Satan’s temptations. That we can do nothing of ourselves, (notwithstanding its literal truth,) is a dishonest, equivocating, Antinomian plea, when urged as a reason for not endeavouring to do whatsoever is commanded by the All-wise God, who knoweth our frame. God does not leave them alone who strive to do always those things that please Him : neither are men required to do any thing of themselves. The adversary who quoted and misapplied the Scriptures in tempting Christ, is equally sinister in perverting religious proverbs to the worst uses.

Let us steadily contemplate the importance, the difficulty, the sacred obligation, of the duties our hand findeth to do : and while we cry, “Who is sufficient for these things?” let us acknowledge God our Saviour, by confessing His right to appoint our work, and His all-sufficiency as our helper : then will He direct our paths, and through Him we shall do valiantly.

The contents of the text lead us to consider, in the second place, the manner in which whatsoever we have to do should be performed ; namely, with our might.

This phrase has all the force and extent of what is frequently misquoted instead of it, “with *all* thy might.” The word *all* adds nothing to the sense ; for a man’s might is his full strength : and the useless interpolation (which is also frequently and improperly introduced into

the petition, "deliver us from evil") rather lessens both the strength and the elegance of the expression.

Such duties as have now been pointed out deserve and require our might. Had we the faculties of the first archangel, we might task them nobly in the works which are given us to do; for the highest powers are well employed in doing whatever is the will of God. And though it is criminal presumption and dangerous self-delusion for any to excuse themselves and evade their duty, by pleading weakness and inability, let every reader be warned that the things he is bound to do cannot be done with indolent endeavours. The weakest must use all the strength they possess; the strongest will find that they have nothing over, but must exert their might.

In order to have the full use and advantage of our actual might, a right method is necessary. If two strong men work at the same task, the one awkward and unwieldy, depending on mere muscular force, the other dexterous both from habit and from prompt contrivance; it will be seen that while the first wastes the greater part of his strength in efforts which accomplish little work, though they distress and weary the workman, the other applies his exertions with decided aim, with sure effect, and without useless fatigue, so that his whole ability is rendered serviceable to the work. For the great duties of life, we want an energy so guided and managed as to ensure the best results in the greatest possible abundance.

1. In order to do every duty as it ought to be done, we must act with the might of solemn conviction. Supposing equal inclination in both cases, any one can act more powerfully in what his judgment approves, than in what he regards with doubt, or knows to be wrong. The way to such conviction is by the road of thorough examination and honest reflection. Our blessed Lord teaches that it is for want of consideration that the word has no effect on

wayside hearers : and God complains, saying, "Israel doth not know, my people do not consider." It is necessary that the conviction be solemn : not a cold and careless assent to transcendent truth, but such a conviction as engages the heart and the will with the judgment. For want of this, much moral strength lies dormant. Effectual conviction is wanting because serious consideration has been neglected. And duties are unperformed, often even unattempted, because there is no full and affecting conviction.

2. But the strongest conviction is worse than useless, a mere blasted blossom, if not matured into fruit by an act of the mind, producing the might of well-considered determination.

Do not suppose that it is here forgotten how vain it is for the sinner to resolve in his own strength. He wants to have peace without repentance, faith, and holiness ; and therefore resolves that without giving up all sin, he will make certain immediate, or at least speedy, but limited reforms, in his life : and will afterwards, at a convenient season, more fully turn to God. He only wants to move a little further from the danger ; and is willing to take respite in a false peace. Satan, meanwhile, laughs at his efforts and determinations ; well-knowing that one sin will preserve his whole kingdom in that self-deluded soul.

But so far is it from being vain and useless for a Christian, or a true penitent, to make strong resolutions, that it is absolutely necessary. Without fixed purposes, nothing great or good can be done. "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed ;" and, "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." It is recorded concerning Rehoboam, that, though in some great affairs of his family and kingdom, "he dealt wisely," and though on some occasions of public danger, he was obedient to divine reproof and "humbled himself, so that the wrath of the Lord turned from him," yet, on the whole, and in

the general conduct of his life and reign, "he did evil, because he fixed not his heart to seek the Lord." When Jehoshaphat was reprov'd and threatened for his close alliance with wicked Ahab; he was also expressly commended, because, in general, he had set his heart to seek God. And it is afterwards said of Jotham, that "he became mighty, because he established his ways before the Lord his God."

Why should we not resolve, with our might that, by God's help, we will go to heaven? Why should we ever allow ourselves to waver in such a purpose? Why should we need daily to make fresh resolves in a case so plain? Can we ever need renewed consideration to determine whether it is proper and necessary to flee from the wrath to come, to take Christ's yoke upon us, and to follow Him as our leader and commander to heaven? What have we, once convinced of their vanity, to do any more with idols? He who can never refer to his decisions as final, is always laying foundations; spending his days of grace amidst the rubbish and ruin of un-used materials and demolished beginnings; often commencing afresh, never building up, finishing nothing; and at last surprised by death, amidst the hurry and hesitation of altered plans, intended recommencements, and confused preparations for action.

3. To conviction and determination, add the might of incessant diligence. Almost all the great works ever achieved by man have been produced by a long series of successive efforts, in which each single exertion, however great in itself, bore a very small proportion to the consummate grandeur of the result. Great cities, temples, and pyramids have been raised, not like an exhalation, called up from the earth by magical incantation, or by the song and harp of demi-gods, but by the plain, slow labour of adding stone to stone. But our diligence must be spiritual, not mere bodily exercise; and obedient, not fanciful and

officious; not neglecting the things which are commanded, and offering as a substitute some busy, bustling task of our own device; but doing with earnest simplicity what God requires; and devoting our efforts especially to that vigilant and jealous keeping of the heart, which is needful above all other diligence.

4. Let our well-principled and resolute diligence be inspired with the energy of religious fear and hope; the most powerful of general motives. The whole system of divine administration, as set forth in the Scriptures, presupposes the supremacy of fear and hope amongst the feelings that influence mankind to do, to forbear, or to suffer. They are appealed to in the threatenings and the promises; and are necessary and useful in every stage of our spiritual progress. If hope is feeble in your heart, if the things promised do not sufficiently affect you, have recourse to the quickening stimulus of sacred fear; think of the wrath to come; of the dreadful certainty and intolerable weight of that ruin which will fall on him who neglects the great salvation. But it is far nobler and happier to be moved by religious hope. If living by faith, (which you should ever do,) you will derive from divine conviction of things hoped for, but not seen, a strong hope; which, like a favouring gale, will fill your sails on the voyage to heaven. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" not with a slavish and desponding trepidation, but with a solemn, stirring, inspiring sense of the impending nearness, the surpassing glory and terror of the things eternal.

5. But all that have been mentioned will finally avail nothing, unless you also obtain and exert the might of a supernatural strength:

"Strong in the strength which God supplies,  
Through His eternal Son."

Without Him we can do nothing. In order to have this

imparted might, you must be born of God ; and henceforth have His Spirit of power abiding in you, cleansing the thoughts of your heart, and keeping them ever clean, by His ceaseless inspiration. Or to adopt another view under which our Lord has represented our dependence on His grace for all spiritual life and efficacy, we must be grafted as living branches, upon Him the Immortal Vine ; and so abide in vital union with Him, that His life-giving Spirit, as the stock on which we grow, may continually transfuse into and through our spirits, as His branches, the sacred energy, the living stream, without which we wither ; but which, while we abide in Him, will make us strong, flourishing, and fruitful. Samson in his exploits of marvellous vigour, did not differ more from Samson shorn of his hair and weak as another man, than any one human spirit, in an unconverted or backsliding state, differs in moral ability for all works of righteousness, from the same spirit when endued with power from on high, and vigorous with that life whose perpetual spring is hidden with Christ in God.

As it is by faith that we receive this spirit of power, it is by love that we are to exert it. Faith is the medium that unites us to that mysterious strength ; and love is the medium through which the heavenly energy operates in active righteousness. There is an unmeasured might, not born of the flesh, nor of the will of man, in that invincible grace of love, which “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things,” and “never faileth ;” which will outlast all that is preparatory and instrumental in the operations of grace on earth, and will abide, with all perfect things, in

“ The house of our Father above,  
The palace of angels and God.”

In order to have more of this divine strength, we must use what we have, and ask for more. What we do not use

will be taken away ; but “to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance.” These divine supplies of spiritual might are like the widow’s oil and barrel of meal which wasted not ; and like the few loaves and fishes multiplied by miracle for the sustenance of thousands. There is “enough for all, enough for each, enough for ever ;” and as our day, our strength shall be. “My grace,” says the Lord, “is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”

6. The great things we have to do, demand the whole man, the might of a disencumbered and vigilant soul. We must lay aside every unnecessary weight ; and put from us every useless thing that would retard or entangle us. The racer does not run for the prize in long and heavy garments ; and “no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life.”

That attention to worldly affairs and duties, which it is lawful and safe for a Christian to bestow, is not a thing which stands out separate and distinct from his religion ; but is comprehended and regulated by his religion, as a part of itself. We must not attempt to “serve God and mammon ;” but remembering that “whatsoever is not of faith is sin,” while we are “not slothful in business,” we must “be fervent in spirit,” so as in and by that business to be “serving the Lord.” Whatsoever we do in word or deed, we must “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ;” in submission to his authority, and in regard to his glory.

Scriptural religion is thus consistent and comprehensive ; and in order that, in obedience to its inspired direction, we may do with our might whatever ought to be done, we must reserve our time, strength, attention, and affection, for these things : saving all that can be saved from needless business and care ; from deceitful enervating pleasures ; from unprofitable amusements ; and especially shaking off those numerous artificial necessities which monopolize the time and dissipate the thoughts of those who timidly

or indolently submit to be ruled by fashion, custom, and ceremony. Save all you can from needless, useless, or mere voluntary engagement of your moral power ; that you may give all you can to the best and most indispensable duties. Give up the approbation of fools, the painful acquisition of wealth, with all frivolous and sordid things, that you may apply your whole unembarrassed might to that doing of the will of God, which, excelling and surviving the world and the lust thereof, will abide for ever.

7. In addition to all that has been mentioned, we want the might of a warrior fully armed and disciplined for defence and for action. Every judicious warrior puts off whatever would uselessly burden him, or impede the full exertion of his strength ; puts on what will conveniently and securely defend each vital part ; and takes to himself the most approved and effectual weapons. The difference between a weak man totally unarmed, and a strong man cased in mail, with helmet, shield, spear, and sword, is not so great as the difference between a negligent, unguarded soul, and the circumspect soldier of Christ, who puts off by self-denial every incumbrance, and takes to himself all the defences and arms of holy warfare which can be derived from the word of God, from the means of grace, from the fellowship of saints, and from the communion and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

Almost all that is pertinent or needful to be stated and urged on this subject, is already expressed with nervous simplicity by our sacred poet :—

“ Soldiers of Christ, arise,  
And put your armour on,  
Strong in the strength which God supplies,  
Through His Eternal Son.

Stand then in His great might,  
With all His strength endued ;  
But take, to arm you for the fight,  
The panoply of God.



Leave no unguarded place,  
No weakness of the soul ;  
Take every virtue, every grace,  
And fortify the whole.

To keep your armour bright,  
Attend with constant care,  
Still walking in your Captain's sight,  
And watching unto prayer."

Such are the chief elements of spiritual might : solemn conviction ; well-considered determination ; incessant diligence ; religious fear and hope ; supernatural strength, sought by prayer, received by faith, and working by love ; the unsparing sacrifice of incumbrances ; and the putting on of the whole armour of God. He who will carefully and earnestly unite and exert all these, in humble reliance on the ever-present help of his Saviour, will still, indeed, feel that he is an unprofitable servant, but he will so do whatsoever his hand findeth to do, that he will finally receive the vast rewards which are promised "to him that overcometh ;" and to them, who thus "by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality," God will render "eternal life."

It was proposed to consider, in the third place, the motives by which the text enforces the course and manner of action which it enjoins. These are expressed by the following words : "For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest."

1. It is undeniable that we are going to the grave. "The living," if they know anything, "know that they shall die." All the paths of life lead to death. Neither wealth, nor want, nor grandeur, nor insignificance, nor daring strength, nor timid circumspection, can evade or overcome this stern necessity.

Our familiar knowledge of the fact, that we are all going to inevitable death, naturally disposes us to regard the distant danger like all common things, with blunted sensi-

bility, and generally with indifference and neglect. But when the danger actually approaches, the familiar truth is suddenly armed with the intense and painful interest of a new and alarming discovery. To contemplate death at uncertain and obscure distance, with negligent foresight of the final event, and habitual hope of immediate security; boasting of to-morrow, because our life has been an unbroken series of daily escapes,—is a plausible, self-deceiving process, so often repeated by most of us as to have grown up to a tenacious mental habit. Our sense of the mighty coming danger is deluded and weakened through our careless, if not willing mistake in classing the delayed, inevitable hour, which comes but once, amongst other natural changes which come irresistibly at uncertain seasons. We thus unwittingly learn to expect our dissolution in the same vague, uncertain manner that we expect rain or wind, clouds or sunshine: we look for them all, we depend on their coming, but our conduct is influenced by the consideration that they come at intermediate and irregular times. The influence by which surrounding objects move us to resolve and to act is not the true and proper nature of the objects themselves; it is the impression or notion, whether strong or weak, mistaken or correct, which is received from the objects, and afterwards, either wholly or partially, vividly or dimly, retained in the mind. According to this course of our nature, either through the pressure of other present interests, or through the familiar commonness of death, as a long foreseen object, our sense of its nearness and awful certainty is obscured and weakened; and then the alteration thus made in our impressions alone affects our conduct as if it were a real change in the dreaded object. The only actual change is, that our variable impressions have become dim and weak, yet we take courage to feel and to act as if death itself had been made remote or doubtful. We become familiar with the

name and idea of death, and then proceed as if we had tamed the monster itself. We forget that we are going to the grave, and then act as if forgetfulness had made us immortal. Thus are we often deceived, both in vigorous health, and in moderate sickness; but in the moments of short suspense on the brink of the dark abyss, it is found that the various causes which so long diminished the idea, have not diminished the tremendous reality. It is then felt that the vast importance of that great change in our mode of being is as indubitable as our constant, compulsory journey to the grave. And it is equally beyond doubt or debate, that it is pre-eminently necessary to be provided and prepared for that world to which we must go, to which we know ourselves to be incessantly going; and, that we may be so ready, we must now do, with our might, what God has given us to do.

2. The chief meaning of the other expressions in the text—"no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom,"—is, that now, during our journey to the grave, is the only time to prepare and provide for that unseen, but awfully real world to which death will remove us. What ought to be done here cannot be done there. This life and the life to come were ordained by the Master of life for different and separate uses; and He will not permit us to mingle, confound, or exchange them. The knowledge and enjoyments which He has reserved for that future life cannot be anticipated; no living man may lift the veil with which He has covered that mysterious realm; nor will it be allowed to the departed to unite with the immense and momentous discoveries of eternity, the precious, peculiar, awful privileges and opportunities of time.

God has given suitable, sufficient, seasonable aids and opportunities; but human perverseness would labour at the wrong time. Now is God's time for helping man to work out his salvation; for accepting man's submission to

the Gospel, for dispensing pardons to believing penitents; for employing His reconciled subjects and adopted heirs in doing good to men, and serving the cause of Christ. To seek the Lord by repentance and praying faith, to serve Him with obedient love, to warn the wicked, to relieve the wretched, to feed and watch the flock of God, to spread and promote truth and righteousness, are works which God "now accepteth" from man; but He will not have these done in the grave. If we neglect them now, we may unexpectedly die, in the midst of unfinished purposes, and still premeditated plans of amendment; and then God will give no opportunities.

It seems from one part of revelation, which opens some awful glimpses into that hidden region where the departed have their being, that the damned are not permitted to do good. The rich voluptuary who cried to Abraham across the great gulf, and failed in his request for a drop of water, was reminded of the great truth which the latter part of the text implies, that there is no road, no access, from heaven to hell, nor from hell to heaven. For this cause, that lost one next requested that his five surviving brethren might receive a warning visit from Lazarus. A visit from the dead brother himself would have been more impressive; but it appears he had no hope of being allowed to perform, after death, a duty of brotherly kindness which he had neglected all the days of his life.

If we die in the unrepented and unpardoned neglect of what God requires at our hands, all which remains is, that among all the monsters of wickedness, among the miserable multitudes who are forsaken of all good, and shut up from all help and hope by the bars of the pit, we must endure the righteous, intolerable punishment. From the day when "the waters of Noah" overwhelmed the drowning millions of the old world, those "spirits in prison," with all who have since been driven away in their wicked-

ness; with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah; with the Egyptian host that died in the depths of the Red Sea; with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and all their company; with Balaam and the thousands of Moab and Midian who fell with him before the sword of Joshua; with the extirpated nations of Canaan, whose iniquity was full; with the sinners, the Amalekites, whom Saul and David cut off; with the army of Sennacherib, smitten by the angel of the Lord; with the impenitent Jews who perished at Jerusalem, when the last temple was destroyed; with all the famous enemies and persecutors of the saints, and all the nameless and obscure crowds of guilty spirits, whom the sun by day, and the moon by night, during forty centuries, have watched from earth to the invisible world!—all that innumerable host gathered from all ancient and all modern nations, have found, to this day, that, “though hand join in hand,” though all the dead generations assemble and confederate, yet “the wicked shall not be unpunished.” All that bodiless multitude, in all the ages since the gates of prayer were shut against them, have found no means, no season in that world, to perform the neglected duties of time, or to *work* out their salvation.

Neither in the intermediate state between death and judgment, nor in that abyss of dark futurity which shall follow the last day, can all the conspiring subtlety of that lost multitude invent any *device* to evade or mitigate their doom.

In the grave, those who hated the *knowledge* of God, and did not choose the fear of the Lord, will call, but He will not answer; will seek Him, but never find.

And there can be no sphere of operation for wisdom, where there is no choice. It is the office of wisdom to direct us to choose the best ends, and to show us the best means for obtaining them. But in the outer darkness amidst the noise of weeping and wailing and gnashing of

teeth, among the raging and blaspheming spirits, who have neglected what they ought to have done, and wasted their might in their own way, upon their own devices, in the service of the destroyer, there will be no occupation for wisdom ; no end for wisdom to choose when all is over ; no means for wisdom to employ when all is lost ; no operations or endeavours for wisdom to guide where change is impossible ; no sphere of action, influence, or counsel, for that wisdom which comes too late.

Let every reader reflect upon this, that the things which ought to be done are so required at his hand, that he cannot shake off his responsibility, and will not be permitted to evade it. He must do or die. The gospel itself, with all its gracious freeness, does not make void, but establishes this law. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." The offer of full pardon, through repentance, and faith in the atonement, does not cancel the obligation, nor preclude the necessity, of doing with our might whatever ought to be done. He does not repent who still wishes that he could have impunity in sin, that for his corrupt convenience God would relax the strictness, and stain the purity of His holy law. He who does repent, acknowledges His righteous obligation to perform every duty with his might. None but penitents receive the atonement through faith : the true believers show their faith by their works ; and only the diligent will be found of Christ, "in peace, without spot, and blameless."

Let it also be remembered, that the works which are given us to do, demand our might. If we presume to think that less than our might will avail, fearful will be the penalty of our presumption. He who will not strive, shall seek in vain to enter the straight gate.

And what you do, O reader, do quickly. You are going to the grave. The judge standeth at the door. Whether

you make haste or linger, the great question, Whether you will be lost or saved,—will soon be determined. Now all may be decided and performed ; in a few days all will be over. And the first moment after death, whether it place you with the blessed or with the tormented, will produce intense conviction, that God's gracious commands ought to be done, that they deserve and claim to be done with your might, and that opportunity and power to do them are granted only while you are yet going to the grave—now or never.

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